

STUDIES IN MODERN POETRY

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IN
MODERN POETRY

BY

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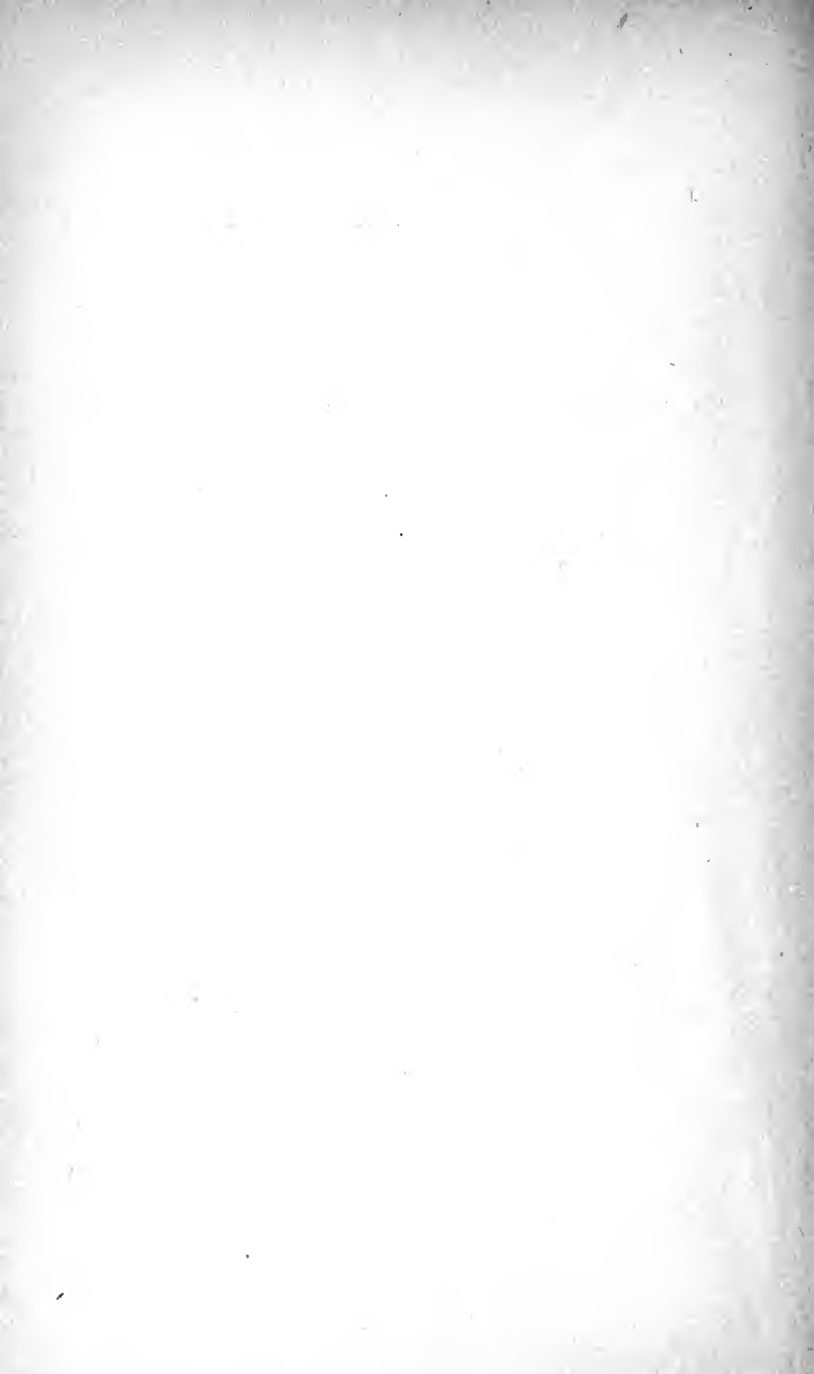
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On the poems of E. A. Poe.

In his essay on the poetic principle Poe defines the art of verse as 'the rhythmical creation of beauty', and finds its source in the human aspiration to supernal loveliness. In *The Raven*, more than in any of his poems, the form is direct in its appeal to the reader's mind, in calling up before us the effulgence of another world, in expressing that thirst for immortality, which is the true essence of poetry. Here all is transformed by the magic of art, and endowed with a wider meaning and a deeper significance; we perceive that the bird is a symbol of despair, — that the poet's eager questions are not only suggested by his love for the lost Lenore, but spring out of his heart's core as spiritual flowers aspiring to an eternal sun, — that they are indeed the utterance of his intense and ardent yearning for everlasting life. In this mystic transfiguration of reality, sublimity is attained; we enjoy the pure ecstasy of beauty in the sincere, perfect manifestation of a noble soul. The forlorn melancholy at the beginning is gradually turned into utter hopelessness, the hesitating questioning into violent imprecations, while the sumptuous and quiet room is transformed into a

sombre place 'by horror haunted'. This change is brought about by means of subtle modifications of tone; the various themes are cleverly introduced, giving the impression of exquisite melodies soaring above the tumult of harsh discords. The faint whispering of the sorrowful Past becomes almost inaudible in his pensive loneliness; and then rings the grim laughter of despair, which, through some sorcery of the imagination, has taken the shape of an uncanny bird, whose fiery eyes seem to burn in his inmost heart, — whose inexorable answers always disappoint his soul yearning to be consoled, unwilling to yield. At the sinister call the poet awakes from weariness to terror; his mind shrinks shuddering from the dark gulf, while bitter regrets, mournful remembrances come flocking around him. Yet Hope still outlives the cruel trial; out of the mystery of death the echo of the crystal tinkling of angelic harps still sweetens his obscure agony. In his spiritual garden, where the roses of joy have been thinned by the winter chill of grief, the memory of Lenore, not in the slumber of death, but clothed in unearthly radiance, still shines, imperishably beautiful; he may still dream in the grove of palms, where the nepenthe offers him its dewy urn of forgetfulness. But at last the ethereal image, quivering like the reflection of a water-lily in azure waters, begins to fade; the bright visage, around which his thoughts rose in fragrant incense, disappears, as when a cloud thickens over the moon; the seraphic strains die on the moaning breeze.

While in *Ulalume* and *The Sleeper* the artifices used to weave the spell of verbal melody are skilfully concealed, in some stanzas of *The Raven* we feel perhaps

too conscious of the effort to produce musical effects by means of the arrangement of rhymes and by the use of alliteration; we are, however, deeply impressed, throughout the poem, by the weird, long-resounding cadences, by the well-timed recurrence of the leading themes and their striking development. Moreover the musical glamour is enhanced through the contrast between the impassioned tone of the poet's questions, the delicate harmonies of sad remembrance and intimate sorrow, and the abrupt, monotonous resonance of the bird's answer. There is a parallel effect of violent chiaroscuro in the colouring and illumination of the picture, — the soft glow of the angelic visitation, the vision of gleaming wings, of golden censers swung by Seraphim, the radiant figure of Lenore, being contrasted with the darkness of the stormy night, the gloom of the Plutonian shore. Likewise the celestial splendour, the divine repose of 'distant Aidenn' is opposed to the motionless, fatal shadow from which the poet's soul 'shall be lifted, nevermore!'

The main characteristics of Poe's artistic temper are here revealed: his pathos, his terrors and hopes; the images with their visionary glow are representative of his essential mood, in which a delicate melancholy is blended with an inexplicable awe.

Even more subtly mystical is *Ulalume*. The poet, vainly seeking release from painful memories, is wandering at night, with Psyche, — the winged sister of his dreams, the image of his soul, — through a titanic forest, where hellish Powers are lurking beside misty tarns; the shadows fall heavily on his heart as on the withering, dew-drenched leaves whispering of unattained happiness, of hopeless grief. And now the

growing radiance of an unknown star spreads a veil of glimmering light over the skies; the crystalline rays flitting through the funereal branches pierce the sombre draperies woven by autumnal vapours, and seem to trace a path leading to the ebony door of a sepulchre. Psyche tries in vain to dissuade him from the lure of the dismal place; the poet yields to the sortilege, and suddenly a remembrance dawns upon him: once, in this ancestral vault, was laid by him the beautiful Ulalume; no more the magnificence of dreams was in her eyes, like a treasure under the waves of the sea; the pallor of death overspread her pure features. Here, in this ghoul-haunted woods, he had seen the end of his brightest hopes, the beginning of his sorrow.

Ulalume is the most technically perfect of Poe's lyrics; here, as in a sonata of Schumann, the mournful repetends are woven into a fantastic rhapsody, a dark arabesque of mystic loveliness; the all-pervading harmony turns, as only music can do, his personal grief into universal pathos, his pain into perfect beauty. The witchery of fairy harps seems to ring in his lines and to allure him irresistibly to despair, his heart's throbbing falling in with the rhythm of the incantation. The bizarre symbols compose a severe and strange pattern around the central figure; the fiery river of lava flowing from Mount Yaanek in ice-bound, hyperboreal regions is an emblem of passion burning in a desolate mind; Astarte, the Death-star, the 'sinfully scintillant' planet, arises with sibylline brilliancy over the mist of confuse remembrances. It is like entering a buried world of sepulchral solemnity, of somptuous charm, a world hardly known in art, except in Odilon Redon's drawings, in De Quincey's *Suspiria de Pro-*

fundis or in Francis Thompson's *Mistress of Vision*. There is a demoniac fascination in this underworld, dimly lit by the bediamonded tiara of the Assyrian queen of Love and Death. Far from the gaudy and noisy life, the poet's soul, caught in the golden web of dreams, builds a visionary universe out of rapturous melodies, out of intoxicating perfumes of exotic spices; the mysterious star glitters with the treacherous light which plays in the hearts of malefic gems; Psyche, the divine child, is weeping, powerless to fight against the wicked spell; the cypress avenue leads to the immemorial tomb, where sleep the dead shrouded in purple and dusky gold, and around which the vampires are silently hovering.

In *The Sleeper* the author intended to immortalise the vision of a fair lady lying in death's sweet and conscious sleep, with a strange smile on her pale lips. Every trace of earth has passed away, the storm of life is over, the sullen conflagration of passion is quenched at last into the stillness and silence of eternal night. The details of the wistful, symbolic landscape, — the lake, the garden, the crumbling tower, — attain a sort of supernatural loveliness in this sacred peace. For all their sad and sombre tones, there is a hidden ecstasy, as of unearthly bliss, in these lines. The sense of immortality is only enhanced by the hint at the fluttering, eerie Shadows, at the worms of corruption, crawling about, vainly threatening the incorruptible essence of the spirit.

The most ethereal figures depicted by Tennyson seem to have nothing to tell beyond their message of dainty, ephemeral grace; like a passing day-dream they do not linger in our memory, but soon dwindle

into faint gleaming clouds; on the contrary we feel a deep, inner meaning in the image evoked by Poe, an image conceived in the fire of an ardent love for everlasting beauty. Like a face drawn by Fernand Khnopff, her visage is fair and strange, as of a creature beyond life, luminous in the atmosphere of mystery and pathos created by the haunting melody of the verse, among the fantastic surroundings of subtly entwined symbols. The real world fades away at the solemn music, and from the silver and violet background of the moonlit night, the lady stands out, like a mystic flower, drooping its head in beauty for ever.

The Conqueror Worm deals with a subject well appropriate to the demands of a spirit bent in sombre meditation on the mystery of the grave; it satisfies the melancholy requirements of a mind, which has felt the lure and the bitterness of the world. The allegory is made out of the grandest ideas which haunt the conscience of man: unearthly Powers, passion, and death; the argument of a morality-play is concentrated in the pithy lines of a lyric poem. Here Death has no fascinating beauty, as in Leopardi's *Amore e Morte*; we do not see in his eyes the peace of eternal skies, as in James Thomson's figuration. Here the mystic side of death does not reveal itself to the soul blinded by sorrow; only his inevitable horror haunts the poet's mind; to him death is not the beautiful angel opening the golden doors of immortality, but a monster, acting with the wild rush of a poisonous snake.

The weird drama is played by men driven to sin, to error, to madness by uncanny, powerful Shadows,

the emblems of love, hatred and terror; there is no ray of hope in the gloomy scene, not even the illusive glimmer of beauty. And behind the clouds enfolding the stage an obscure thing is lurking; suddenly it rushes out, thirsting for human blood; and no sooner has the monstrous adder chosen its victim, that it darts to him and buries its fangs in his flesh; the crowd is rapidly destroyed by the dire worm, the stage is splashed with blood, strewn with crumpled bodies, ridged with heaps of corpses; the snake, now crimson with gore, writhes and writhes, working destruction to the last. And then the curtain falls down with thunder, hiding for ever the doomed land of Man. — From this terrible image of the world, when it shall be burnt out by the avenging flame; the music of the spheres dies away in mournful echoes; the Seraphim, the eternal spectators, shimmering pale in their silvery wings, arise aghast, and proclaim that the play is the tragedy of human life and the hero the Conqueror Worm.

In this lyric — the song of Ligeia — a peculiar grandeur is obtained not only through remoteness of time and indefiniteness of space, as in *Dreamland*, but through the vast scope of the allegory; there is nothing dimly shadowed forth, as in *The City in the Sea*; all is tragic certainty in this world-drama. The effect of the picture is increased in proportion to the scale of the subject. The difficulty of the task can only be appreciated by considering how the short lyric is made to hold the whole of Poe's conception of life. The metrical arrangement is simple and grave; it is neither a musical caprice, as *The Bells*, nor a rhapsody, as *Ulalume*; the limpid melody, sustained

by the deep chords of the rhymes, flows rapidly on, and the mournful cries of heart-rending pain wander subtly through its harmony. The wild strains sink into the inmost depths of the soul, awaking thrilling echoes, gradually augmenting in intensity, until they are cleverly worked out into the magnificent climax of the close.

While in *The Sleeper* it is not easy to devine at once, under the thick web of symbolical images, the inmost significance of the poem, we realise immediately the meaning of the allegoric picture in *The Haunted Palace*. The object of the 'improvisation' of Roderick Usher is to praise the supreme Power which has endowed man with sublime spiritual faculties, with noble beauty, and, at the same time, to lament the distress of a darkened mind, the downfall of a divine work. The healthy and vigorous condition of mind is depicted as a palace of fine proportions, of stately magnificence; the glory of the image is brought into forcible evidence by the contrast with the following representation of the Castle of Madness, looming through dark mists, its red windows glaring like rifts of fire in the black walls. Although at a close examination we find details of singular beauty, — the glossy gold of the hair compared to golden banners, the serene glow of the eyes to 'luminous windows', through which the wanderers saw

Spirits moving musically,
To a lute's well-tuned law,

the general effect of clearness and directness is obtained at the cost of suggestive power; as in a Byzantine mosaic, the outlines are too rigid and symmetrical to

possess a deep aesthetic charm. Each symbolic feature is made to conform strictly to reality; but poetical beauty is sacrificed in this restraint imposed by the author on the vague manner of expression, mainly founded on the fascination of music, which is his own characteristic style. Here for once the wild luxuriance of his imagination is checked by the preoccupation of being precise; the result is a certain stiffness and coldness, often found in allegoric works of art.

Symbolic too is *Dreamland*; — *Ulalume* and *The Raven* are emblems of remembrance driving the soul to despair; — *The Conqueror Worm* and *The City in the Sea* are elaborate allegories of the invincible Power, which shall at last rule on the universe, when the world withers into a shadow, and darkness rolling in from the dead silence of infinite space blots out the abode of men; — this poem is a symbol of the irrevocable Past, of the twilight realm of imperishable memories, through which is wandering, for ever lost, the desolate spirit. The lilies trembling on the brink of lonely pools, the trees twisted into fantastic shapes, the convulsed seas, the solemn mountains, the fiery skies, all these various images blend into a single impression, suggesting a bizarre country, a world beyond the world. Some of the details burn with a dazzling glare; the misty outline of others vanish in the gloom; there is an incessant motion in the surging ocean, in the clouds; the monotony of perpetual unrest pervades the uncanny landscape. And in this secluded land, where we come borne on the wings of an eerie music, where shrouded ghosts of beloved friends are roaming in spectral forests, an idol reigns, a dark idol on an ebony throne.

The graceful and dismal symbols brought in again and again by the recurring couplets, by the self-repeating movements of the rhythm, return in the structure of the poem as soul-entangling patterns in a magic arabesque. The arrangement of sounds is so contrived as to weave a mournful and delicate dirge, as to compose a music, which is like the mystic chanting of waves breaking on an eternal shore.

Unlike some passages in *Al Aaraaf* and *Tamerlane*, which are a patchwork of brilliant, but desultory images, *The City in the Sea* blends all its details into a majestic whole; the traceries on the walls, the carvings on the lintels, the open work of the spires, the jewelled tombs, contribute to the austere grandeur of the titanic town, the huge and fantastic cathedral of Death. Its numberless domes and minarets are mirrored in the glassy waves of the sea, beneath which we descry the lurid flare of the fires of Hell. It rises high, a sinister island lit by the shimmering ocean. There is something hieratic in its architecture, which seems to partake of all the styles; we are struck by a barbaric splendour in its richness of gold and marble, and by a Greek purity in the freezes, combining in dainty ornaments 'the viol, the violet and the vine'. The visionary city seems to take the reflection of the sumptuous and horrid dream glowing in the poet's heart, a dream in which the dreadful solemnity of death is overlaid with the stately pomp suiting the Conqueror of all human greatness. The ghastliness of corpses is clad in imperial state; the weird town itself is like a royal corpse, swathed in gorgeous cerements, waiting for its final doom in a begemmed vault.

The City in the Sea forms with *Dreamland* a mystic

diptych of the afterworld; but while in the latter a sense of sadness is predominant, in the former we are under the sway of nameless terror. Here it is the realm of silence and immobility, of utter stillness; and yet there is anguish and fever in the clouds curling upwards as coils of incense from invisible censers swung before the dark idol; there is a hidden anxiety in the waves; and at last there is motion, or rather the prefiguration of motion, of the instant

when, amid no earthly moans,
Down, down that town shall settle hence.

Fairyland is a landscape seen by visionary eyes, a refuge of peace for the weary soul, a dusky land where we hardly descry cypress groves and grey waterfalls on the misty hills; in the pale glimmer all is still and silent, steeped in lethargic languor; castles, hamlets and forests, the haunts of fairy people, lie deeply asleep in the magic light. It is a secluded valley in the country where the Castle of Indolence of James Thomson raises its enchanted turrets; the same opiate atmosphere, heavy with drowsiness, pervades the dale, rendered more fantastic by the change of illumination according to the waxing and waning of gigantic moons. In the introduction to the first draft of the poem the poet reveals to us how the scene was suggested to him by a moonbeam playing through the rose-entwined bower, waking, with its 'tinkling' on the grass, dreamy echoes in his mind.

We find in *The Valley of Unrest* a scene of a quite opposite character. Here Poe has drawn the image of a mind distressed by unaccountable terrors, by a

feverish restlessness; silence and peace never descend into the forlorn dell, quivering, as a volcanic chasm, with the turmoil of inner fires. The impression of mystery is deepened by the perpetual motion of the clouds, waters, trees, flowers; a suggestion of invisible presences comes from this inexplicable agitation; a sensitive, melancholy soul seems to live in every part of the scene; the shuddering lilies bend over the tombs like ghostly memories; tears of everlasting sorrow glisten in the blue eyes of the violets; the trees are whispering a tale of despair, the waters palpitate as suffering hearts, and the clouds rustle with a bizarre murmuring, with heavy and long sighing and sobbing. The only image of rest is the red-gold light of the slanting sunbeams, lying drowsily on the trembling flowers.

Should we compare this lyric with the prose-poem *Silence*, we might perceive at once that Poe has refined on his former conception and found a new element of deeper awe in the absolute stillness of a motionless landscape.

In *The Bells* the poet does not aim at the expression of individual, but of universal joys and sorrows; although he draws his inspiration from sweet or sombre recollections of his own life, of his happy childhood, his marriage, the premature death of his wife, yet he is rather thinking of the various vicissitudes of man, of his time when everything appears

Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream,

of the joy and peace of sacred love, of sudden dangers, of the inevitable doom. The visions of infancy glitter

in the first stanza, while a fragrance of nuptial flowers seems to breathe out of the second strophe. He suggests his thoughts by means of the different sound of bells, as they tinkle at Christmas-tide under a sky all a-shiver with the trembling lamps of stars, as they ring with golden harmony calling to festal rites, or clang beneath fiery clouds, or clash in the Tower of the Ghouls. The ghostly king is tolling in the steeple, as if hammering an iron crown for Death to wear; in the dark fortress, against which vainly dashes the yelling or imploring surge of life, he rings the knell with feverish, hurried strokes, as though eager to proclaim that Doomsday is come at last, when earth shall burn into a white flame. The magnificent symphonic arrangement of the lines gives a peculiar fascination to the complex, fantastic imagery; the rushing rhythm is quivering with intense fervour.

We come now to poems of love and remembrance. In *Annabel Lee* the memory of a delicate girl, departed from earth in youth and beauty, blossoms in the poet's heart as a lonely lily, waving, slender and frail, on the strand of the ocean. With trembling tenderness and tears the poet weaves a garland of glimmering flowers around the never-forgotten grave. A deep emotion arises from this mournful lullaby, from its lines deeply alive with intense pathos. The form expresses with a quaint naïveté, as in a folk-song, the theme which is always haunting Poe's mind: the death of beauty. The subtle shades of feeling are pointed out in this ballad by changes of melody skilfully contrived, and a striking effect is obtained by means of repetends, almost too persistent in their frequent occurrence; the tone of the chords 'rich and

strange' blends with a touching simplicity of diction. The lamentation is woven out of the solemn images of the sea, the sepulchre, the cold winds of death; and the pathos of the picture is deepened by the twilight atmosphere darkening the desolate place.

In *To One in Paradise* the image of the departed, radiant with eternal happiness, is contrasted with dark symbols of the poet's miserable life, — the lonely shore of a sombre sea, a grim hurricane blighting his hopes, hurling to the ground the proud eagles of his songs. The wilderness, stretching far away about him, is opposed to the breathless calm of immortal skies. Sorrow has dimmed the star of joy, for ever; pain, a fiery lightning, has blasted the tree of life; but a wind scatters the clouds, rends the heavy mist, and, among the wreck of the storm floating slowly away, affords him glimpses of supernal regions, where his Beloved, like the Blessed Damozel, waits for him beside the glittering waters of musical rivers, clothed in a glory of silvery radiance.

A mystic tenderness pervades the poem *To Helen*, [I saw thee once — once only — ...]. The moon is shedding an opal light, raining a mystic influence on the garden, where the lady is sitting among the crimson glow of roses; hope shines in her eyes, and the poet yields to the soothing magic of the balmy air, of the murmurous leaves, singing in an undertone, lulling his sorrow to rest. His heart awakens to a new happiness as he stands on the threshold of the enchanted garden. And now the moon is setting; no more its beams sleep on the grass in pools of effulgent splendour; and now, as a tune melts floating away on the wind, the lady disappears among the gloomy trees. — Violets

and lilies are hidden in darkness, but the white figure is always present to his mind, upholding in the cup of her woven fingers a deathless flame, shimmering in the shadow under the leafy roof. A pure, beautiful soul has set its seal upon the poet's heart; a change is wrought in him for ever; the lake of Pain is changed into liquid silver, its dark flowers into unwithering water-lilies; — her eyes, like immortal stars, draw a path of shivering light on the black waves, as if a flight of blessed Spirits had crossed them from end to end. Her eyes shine for ever — celestial gems — under the forest shades; joy is born out of the agony of life; Fate is no more Sorrow, but a clement, exalting Power, and the poet bows with resignation to death, because he sees eternal hopes beyond a shadowy shore.

The lines *To* — [Mrs. Marie Louise Shew] 'Not long ago, the writer ...' look like a preliminary sketch of the reverie *To Helen* 'I saw thee once...' — ; both, however, were published in 1848. They reflect with a dreamy grace the same blissful mood, the soul-uplifting vision of a noble, pure, compassionate woman. Hope discloses to the poet an empurpled perspective, where the radiant image, softened by a luminous haze, by a floating veil of violet vapours, rises, as a guiding star in the solitary night of his life.

In the short lyric *To Helen* [Helen, thy beauty...] the artist has carved as in an exquisite cameo a profile of Hellenic grace, a visage seen in that mystic slumber where reality ends and dream begins, where the hardness and inequalities of matter are smoothed into absolute perfection by a visionary light; a halo of spiritual lustre surrounds the shapely head. We have

not in this poem the obvious ideal of loveliness evoked by Tennyson, lacking, in spite of its refined characteristics, the ethereal glory, which alone endows with a perennial glamour a work of art; we have here a portrait of more intimate beauty, more direct in its appeal to our noblest faculties. We feel that at last a beauty growing out of the purest recollections of life, a beauty which evades definition and can only be suggested by the inevitable charm of music, has been rendered by a form carried to the point where outline, colour and sentiment become pure melody. The musical element, however, is here subtly concealed under the apparent ease of the versification, under the rhythm quivering with the fervour of the inspiration.

While this little poem may be compared to an agate intaglio and *Annabel Lee* to a memorial jewel of ivory and pale gems, *Eulalie* looks rather like a figure outlined on the burning amethysts and topazes of a stained-glass window, an apparition clothed in radiant colours. The clouds of sorrow are broken, and she appears as a momentary gleam of joy, her golden curls framing the smiling, pure beauty of her visage. The picture has not the hard metallic glitter of Moore's Oriental descriptions, but the diaphanous prismatic glow of Shelley's *Epipsyichidion* or Mallarmé's *Sainte*. *For Annie* is perhaps superior in the musical arrangement of the lines; and yet, in spite of the living melody flowing from stanza to stanza as a harmonious river on a marble bed, in spite of the vivid expression of the unearthly bliss in which are now merged the impassioned remembrances of the poet, the emotion aroused is not so deep as when Poe is at his best. There is something artificial in the texture of the

strophes, there is a wearisome prolixity in the insistent recurrence of the repentends, and when the fairy music is over, we have no haunting feeling of beauty, as after reading *Ulalume* or *The Sleeper*.

Israfel remains, with *Eulalie*, an exception in Poe's sombre work; both poems are the utterance of an ecstatic joy. The bright spirit Israfel is the emblem of the poet's delight in music, of the rapture which certainly filled his heart while he was composing his fascinating melodies. Here we see his longing after the only kind of poetry apt to convey his dreams, a poetry intimately connected with music, as solely through verbal harmonies could be realised his ideal of aesthetic perfection. The lyric is also the expression of his yearning after a more luminous and jocund world, far from 'our mortal mornings grey', — a world, where the soul, withdrawn from earthly cares, enjoys an infinite bliss. The red lightning, the moon, the dancing stars weave a garland of light around the beautiful angel, the symbol of perfect song, of the harmony which transfigures reality, adding a mystic grace to passion, clothing the earth with a veil of ethereal splendour.

To my Mother is a tribute of love, a token of his earnest, sincere affection towards his mother-in-law, Mrs. Clemm. Revealing the native refinement and the spontaneous ardour of a thankful heart, the pensive lines clothe with living music a deep and unchanging tenderness for the noble soul, whose steady and faithful support made it possible for the unhappy and self-absorbed artist to live and work. The poem is pervaded with a mystic feeling, which finds also utterance in the beautiful prayer, inserted in *Morella: Hymn*,

— a prayer like a delicate illumination on the marge of the sombre tale, — a brief lyric endowed with pure energy of inspiration and religious fervour.

The address *To F* — [Beloved! amid the earnest woes ...] expresses with exquisite phrasing, with penetrating melody, a thought of thankfulness; the closing image, delicately shaped by his fancy, contrasting his stormy life with the radiance of an unalterable affection, shows the changeless serenity of love above the troubled weariness of a heart, torn by bitter struggles not only against the exterior world, but especially against its wild inmost tendencies. The poem 'I heed not that my earthly lot ...', — a combination of regret and sorrow, — makes its appeal through a sense of pity touching with noble pathos the passionate outburst; in its brevity it is a flawless accomplishment and hardly wants further development. On the contrary the verses *To F — s O — d* (Frances Osgood): 'Thou wouldst be loved? ...' are a complimentary address of no great intrinsic value; likewise the lines 'The bowers whereat, in dreams, ...' interweaving dim reveries and vague symbols, embodying uncertain echoes of passion rather than well definite thoughts, show few signs of his poetic faculty; a deep pathos burns in the simile:

Thine eyes, in Heaven of heart enshrined,
Then desolately fall,
O God! on my funereal mind
Like starlight on a pall;

but the conception is not adequately developed and lacks a corresponding vigour of expression.

The delicate trifle *A Valentine* belongs, as *An*

Enigma, to a lighter kind of poetry than any of Poe's compositions, and, although it shows a remarkable constructive skill, it is enfeebled by the artifice which led to its making; both of them look like mere metrical exercises, vacuous and futile. In *To the River* — a somewhat frivolous thought is wrought into a graceful image, and the fresh atmosphere is lit up with a sense of gaiety, very rare in Poe.

In *Stanzas* the poet gives utterance for the first time to his aspirations after that spiritual beauty which pierces through matter; he has by now trained his ear to catch the leading strains in the vast symphony of the world, and educated his eye to perceive a meaning in the intricate pattern of lines and colours of the landscape. An eerie feeling of invisible presences creeps over him while he is contemplating the changeful scenery; Nature's voice rouses an uncanny echo in his heart, her inward splendour haunts his mind. A vision of beauty supernal, transcending sensible forms, a vision which is 'a symbol and a token' of a life beyond mortal existence, dawns in his inmost soul; henceforth his forehead shall bend under the diadem of unearthly dreams; — an ecstasy of love for eternal things shall bridge the time of his life from the moment of this revelation to his death.

As regards the form, we notice in these lines the more or less conscious adoption of a new manner of expression, full of audacity in its naïve originality, but far from perfect; notwithstanding the elaborate craftsmanship, the phrase is still elusive; the artist strives to impart his rare emotions by means of a thoroughly personal style, which, however, only conveys a suggestion of his subtle conceptions. It is in *Alone*

that we find a clear representation of this unusual psychological state. The vision of a soul enclosed within the boundaries of utter loneliness is at once limited and sharpened, the sight sifting, so to say, the impressions, and discarding the common, trivial sensations in order to let in only the most peculiar perceptions. A mystic twilight seems to brood over the world; to the poet, living on the borderland between Dream and Reality, Nature becomes a magic, living temple, such as Baudelaire describes in his *Correspondances*:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

The sunbeams in the wood turn to dancing elves, the ruddy gold of the autumnal foliage to the glowing hair of fairies, flowers have human visages, and the towering cloud becomes a threatening demon.

The appeal of a Medusæan beauty underlies the subtle poem *Silence*; here the spiritual landscape stretches beyond the boundaries of the world, to limits which seem no more within the ken of man; here the introspective mind of the poet instead of suggesting a sense of dismal grandeur by shaping his feelings into well-definite symbols, as he does in *The City in the Sea* and *Dreamland*, adopts a simple, direct expression to convey an abstract emotion, the long-remembered terror he has experienced in his wanderings through the realm of thought. According to Poe there are two kinds of silence: a material, finite silence, — that of solitude and death, — and an

incorporeal, infinite one, — the silence of unearthly places, forbidden to mankind; they bear the same relation of a solid to its shadow, of the shore to the far-reaching sea, of the body to the soul. The former dwells in desolate, secluded corners, in churchyards haunted by sad memories, where the words 'no more' are carved on the crumbling tombstones; there is no terror in it, no power to harm, but a soothing melancholy; the latter — the soul of Silence — is a magic elf, hovering in regions untrodden by the foot of man, and a destructive force lurks in its nameless dread. We become aware of mysterious possibilities, we are thrilled with a sense of hidden danger through the spell of the sober, reticent phrases, while we admire the originality of conception and the successful effort to disentangle elementary emotions from a complex psychological state (1).

The essential originality of *The Lake* does not lie so much in the vivid suggestion of the sombre glamour of dark, lonely waters, for ever still among black pine forests and basaltic cliffs, as in the subtle notation of that strange delight in terror, of that perverse enjoyment of intense dread, which is the keynote of his best tales.

Poe's soul was overpowered by a new kind of Beauty — the beauty of Terror; his spell-bound mind did not see any possibility of escape, and gave itself up to the elation of the deadly enchantment. It is the same lure which he symbolized in the bewitching brilliancy of Astarte, in *Ulalume*.

(1) The metrical scheme is that of the Shakespearean sonnet, with a line added after the eighth verse, rhyming with the preceding one, like a 'chiave' in a canzone stanza.

In this poem, however, the author is only half-conscious of this charm; therefore a certain vagueness of expression is noticeable; the new feeling, which 'the jewelled mine could not bribe him to define', is only dimly evoked by the elfin music of his lines, is only guessed at, as a visage, perhaps sinister or beautiful, under a black mask.

In *Evening Star*, as in several of his juvenile works, Poe has done his utmost to attain originality; the main idea remains, however, rather quaint than beautiful. Although we cannot overlook in the poem the presence of a peculiar sensitiveness, we find traces of a flagging of the inspiration, falling into the strained and the obscure. *Spirits of the Dead* is the first of his poems where we meet with that weirdness which will hereafter be the keynote of his songs. The form is still reluctant and he only succeeds to suggest vague, disquieting sensations; nevertheless the rhythm and music of the lines are already his own, and when the severe, deep chord is first struck, a string — long silent in our heart — becomes immediately responsive to it. The whole has the stern, ominous fascination of a wistful, uncanny face looking out of the gloom of a sepulchral vault; and the effect is intensified by the veil hiding the background, the veil of Mystery hanging over the land beyond the grave.

And the mist upon the hill
Shadowy, shadowy, yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token.
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!

The three lyrics *Dreams*, *Romance*, *A Dream* have several points of affinity both as regards thought

and form; they spring indeed from the same source of inspiration: an intense yearning to forget reality in the ecstasy of visions, mingled with the regret for the vanished dreams of childhood. 'To a passionate heart', Poe says in the first of these poems, 'dreams are better than reality, even though dreams be sorrow'; life would be a continuous rapture, were it possible, as it was to him in his early years, to dream without interruption, to live among the creatures of the fantasy, — were it possible to keep for ever the power of transfiguring the material world into an ideal universe. These lines, though far from perfect in expression, are important as showing already in the poet a self-centred soul which was hardly likely to adapt itself to an age given to mean pursuits, a soul too delicate to come willingly in contact with real life. The characteristic passage,

I have left my very heart
In climes of my imagining, apart
From mine own home, with beings that have been
Of mine own thought,

foreshadows his creation of a purely imaginative world in his works in poetry and in prose. In this composition, owing to his imperfect mastery of the form, Poe gives us only slight, blurred hints of his psychological state; yielding to the confuse promptings of a still uncertain inspiration he does not succeed in working out his poem into an organic whole; it has the painful vagueness inherent to a hasty sketch, and, especially in the first draft, the images woven into an intricate pattern are extremely desultory and incongruous. Nevertheless it is interesting as the literal

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rendering of one of his characteristic moods; it shows us his thirst for emotions stirred by apparitions rather than by reality, by the *spirits* of things rather than by their exterior appearances. Consistently with this desire for a fantastic loveliness, it reveals an utter weariness of life, — the 'taedium vitae' of a mind unconcerned with worldly matters.

While in *A Dream* we have to do with the spell of a unique vision of overpowering bliss, a holy apparition which was to him 'like a lonely guiding spirit, a lovely beam', a star 'more purely bright' than the sun of Truth, — in *Romance* he deals with the change wrought in his soul by the stern influence of sorrow; when 'eternal condor years' spread over him their darkening wings, he came to disdain a light kind of inspiration, and thought worth while to compose only such verses in which should vibrate an inmost, passionate intensity, to play on his fairy harp only music in which his heart 'should tremble with the string'. This lyric is even more faulty from a technical point of view than the two above mentioned poems; the author makes little attempt to clearness and order; the long involved sentences and the over-subtlety of expression produce a sense of obscurity and uncertainty. In the first draft the keynote of his whole future work is struck in the fine lines:

I could not love except where Death
Was mingling his with Beauty's breath.

Here too the image of the symbolic storm is more vividly developed, and the psychological change is dwelt upon with keener insight.

Yet in 'The happiest day — the happiest hour...' — a lyric which owing to its excessive brevity and its elliptical form remains rather obscure — the poet recognises that a wicked, weakening influence was lurking in the lure of visionary hours, in the elation which gives place to smarting pain, — that in the fugitive rapture of his youthful dream 'of power and pride' there was a subtle poison which would insensibly destroy the noblest faculties of the soul.

Eldorado interprets in allegoric form the poet's insatiate longing for the unattainable, for all that has been withheld from him in life; — his daring, undaunted spirit has not fallen on the way, but, as the gallant knight untired by his vain wanderings, is still striving for the conquest of the supreme ideal.

The sonnet *To Science*, in which Poe, as in *To Zante*, adopted the English metrical scheme instead of the traditional Italian form, is a somewhat rhetorical invective against 'the vulture which preys on the poet's heart', spreading its dark wings over the radiant, fantastic side of his conception of the universe.

How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?

It is remarkable that in aftertime scientific speculations were to be for Poe a source of lofty inspiration; witness the prose-poem *Eureka*. In *To Zante* the triteness of the theme — a lovely place becoming accursed for being linked to painful memories — is redeemed by the sincere pathos of the inspiration. Its salient technical feature — the repetition of the words

'no more' — foreshadows the striking refrain in *The Raven*.

It seems at first that no definite purpose were in the poet's mind while composing the quaint tracery of images bearing the title *A Dream within a Dream*; in the first draft of the poem the leading idea, — one of sad parting, of dreamy, lonely sorrow, — appears but dimly through the network of strange metaphors, is indeed lost in the vague, desultory expression; but in its definitive form we become aware of an intense feeling of extreme distress and despair. He was not able, however, to turn into true poetry a highly poetical mood, owing to the fact that he only caught partial glimpses of his psychological condition. Besides, — as Poe himself pointed out dealing with Shelley's *Indian Serenade* (1), — a too short development is not appropriate where a deep emotion, — such as here, — gives rise to a poetical effusion.

We miss the personal note in the *Bridal Ballad*, pervaded by the influence of Moore and Coleridge; the poet has not yet found his true self; there is no original current of feeling to vivify the carefully chiselled strophes, and we meet with a common romantic pathos rather than with sincere passion. The nature of the task was uncongenial to his mind; as in *Lenore*, we perceive that he wanted to be free from any exterior drama in order to feel and express his inward

(1) '... it is clear that a poem may be improperly brief. — A *very* short poem, while now and then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces a profound or enduring effect. There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax.' *The Poetic Principle*.

tragedy. The only remarkable thing in the poem is the happy rendering of the dreamy sorrow of the bride, who has been struck and stunned by sharp and sudden pain. The poem 'I saw thee on thy bridal day' shows evident traces of Byron's and Scott's influence, and *Lenore*, as *Tamerlane*, is a typical instance of his juvenile tendency to Byronic rant; it is a dirge, where a deep tenderness is discernible through the fitful, irregular utterance, broken into bursts of indignant passion and bitter sarcasm; but he does not discard vulgarities of thought and expression,—blemishes which are even more obvious in the two drafts of 1831 [entitled: *A Paean*] and 1843. Poe falls likewise into rhetoric in *The Coliseum*, which is not worthy to be compared with other compositions on the grandeur of ruins, on the ancient majesty of Rome, such as Shelley's or Byron's; its chief value lies in the accumulation of well drawn details; but the golden haze of remoteness, into which the poet endeavoured to steep his picture, is wanting, and we cannot but feel that he has not been able to render the stately melancholy of his subject.

In *Tamerlane* we perceive a conflict between the effort to be original and sincere, and the influence of Byron, between the native bend of the poet to an elliptical, subtle manner of expression and the imitation of an inflated, emphatic style. There is a strange pathos in the lonely figure of the hero, as it stands, darkly outlined on a stormy sky, on the top of a mountain; there is the mystery of a tragic fate on the conqueror's visage, as he bends under the burden of bitter-sweet remembrances and contemplates his life, once a lovely garden, now grown wild, choked

with poisonous weeds, glimmering about an early tomb. There is a lofty reticence throughout his speeches, as he wanders among the ruins of the shattered temple of his hopes, brooding among the crumbling walls, still gorgeously painted with the never fading memories of youth. But, considered as a work of art, *Tamerlane* is not an organic whole; we can easily draw a line between the artificial, merely ornamental parts and the outbursts of genuine passion. In some passages — deeply suggestive, though far from flawless — the quaint beauty of Poe's dream shines out; his poetic energy is already revealed by that strangeness of conception, on which he lays particular stress in the exposition of his aesthetic theories; his true self pierces now and then through the heavy ornamentation; but his individuality, his personal accent are still disguised under a borrowed dress. Only at a close perusal one gradually descries the impassioned ardour, which will brighten up into a vivid radiance in his later works. In Part I, in the graceful picture of the two children, in the tenderness of their affection, we get a foreshadowing of the ethereal love kindling the strophes of *Eulalie* and *Annabel Lee*, and we may foresee the tragic splendour of his mature production from the magnificent description of the thunderstorm. As regards the style, his mind has not yet been trained to see the difference between rhetoric and true inspiration; the same fact may be observed in the first poems of Leopardi. Devoting considerable attention to the rhythm, he overlooks the shades of tone, the charm of subdued harmonies, so that we soon get weary of the loud sonority of the utterance, kept at its highest pitch,

without any break, as a long outcry; this unabated vehemence is unfit for a sustained effort and produces an effect of monotony. He does not discard the ephemeral appeal of tawdry embellishments; he does not understand the beauty of those phrases of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, the significance of which is only grasped by meditation, but then lies deep for ever in our inmost soul. Besides, the occasional obscurity of expression, blurring the ideas, weakens the general impressions. We feel that the author is only on the edge of his poetic world, and has not yet found the music to set his feelings to. The figure of Tamerlane lacks the sense of reality which we admire in Browning's personages; the creative energy of Poe lay on another line; he is unfit to the task of representing a soul so very unlike his own, and in his gallery of delicate, ghostly pictures there is no place for this rude bronze cast. In the portrait of the hero he evinces a desire to startle rather than to stir a lasting emotion, and he does not attain the reserved beauty of Rembrandt, but the vain clamouring of Rubens.

The freshness of feeling and the original naïveté we are wont to look for in juvenile compositions are absolutely wanting in the dramatic fragment, *Politian*; it is an immature work, in which a certain lyric fervour does not make up for the weak treatment of the subject, — a work in its remoteness from life in dialogue and in the rigid outlines in the portraiture of characters more akin to the productions of untrained art at the awakening of the English drama than to the spirited writings of the Elizabethans. Poe tried to paint violent contrasts of feeling, following the practice of the playwrights of the XVII. Century, but

his attempt remains a failure. Whilst in the Elizabethan drama the crude, rough form is admirably fitted for the representation of a tragic world in which stormy, blind, primitive passions are at play, here the mannered, declamatory style fails to produce the intended effect. Beddoes, in his *Death's Jest-book*, Keats in *Otho the Great* and in the fragment of *King Stephen* approached much more closely to the style of the Elizabethans. Poe shows no sense of the precision in character-drawing which the dramatic form requires; he vainly strives to impart an air of lifelikeness to the personages, who are awkwardly sketched. He proposed to contrast Alexander's weariness with Politian's impetuous temper, and Jacintha's careless impertinence with Lalage's thirst for affection; but he only emphasized the unreality of the whole. Politian himself, a Renaissance man with a blending of Romantic languor, a soul inexplicably wavering between grim despair and passionate love, remains unimpressive. The dialogue, where Wyatt's song is inset, is clogged by the slow movement; the repetitions in Alexander's and Lalage's speeches scarcely admit of excuse; there is no sustained power in the monologues, except perhaps in Politian's outburst about the primeval glory of newly discovered lands. Poe wrought out for himself a peculiar style, too studied to be natural, too adorned with images to appear spontaneous, a style which clumsily hesitates between prosaic sing-song and high-flown declamation, and induces a deadening sense of monotony, because sincerity gives everywhere place to artifice.

The research for peculiar musical and pictorial effects is already apparent in *Al Aaraaf*; some pass-

ages, though of little intrinsic value, illustrate Poe's tendency towards a new conception of poetry. The argument of the poem is a vision of cosmic splendours, suggested by the birth and disappearance of a star, Al Aaraaf, discovered by Tycho Brahe. Risen out of the mystery of space, it attained, in a short time, an intense brilliancy, which, however, lasted only a few weeks; then the glittering world began to fade, and soon sank into darkness. — The ethereal birth is first described with gorgeous hues; while iridescent gleams streak the sky, the pearly mists curl into floating wreaths of vaporous radiance, and the new celestial body arises, encircled by bands of purple light, garlanded by many-coloured satellites. Warmed by the fiery refulgence of the neighbouring suns, the ground bursts into blossom, and the land lies spread before us, a wilderness of fragrant gems; we see its presiding spirit, Nesace, crowned with opal beams, kneel on the flowers, we listen to her enraptured song to Heaven. She beseeches God to reveal His will, and a Voice makes answer: 'Carry my embassy; be thou my herald'. Thus ends the first Part; in the second portion Nesace's temple is described; she is singing a sortilege in order to summon the Spirits of Beauty of her realm from the bowers where they lie asleep; beneath the silent streams of stars, out of the shadows of the woods, a fairy being, Ligeia, emerges; the air is lit with pale fire around her hair; she and the other attending Spirits flock around Nesace, except two, Ianthe and Angelo, who remain apart, absorbed in their love. And their love shall stand as an impenetrable barrier between existence and immortality, excluding them from everlasting bliss; the divine light

fades away from their souls, tainted with earthly, imperfect passion; they fall, because

Heaven to them no hope imparts
Who hear not for the beating of their hearts.

The elements, out of which the poem arose, are but imperfectly fused; the poet had not yet acquired a complete command of the material, and in his haste to body forth his desultory dreams he composed a work far from faultless; its construction lacks symmetry and proportion, and the episode of Angelo and Ianthe is rather unsatisfactorily framed in; the passage where Angelo relates the end of the doomed world is not intimately connected with the rest. Several lines are little more than an echo of *Lalla Rookh* or of *The Revolt of Islam*; we feel a sense of artificiality in the style heavily laden with ornaments; besides, there is a tendency to use bizarre similes, which fail to strike us as spontaneous and fitting. Nevertheless, although *Al Aaraaf* shows a mind not yet ripe to reveal itself through an original form, we find in it — especially in the lyric passages, such as the prayer and the incantation sung by Nesace — the suggestive grace, characteristic of the poet's later works; the crude and somewhat tawdry splendour of the elaborate descriptions will afterwards give way to the soft, unearthly glow of *Ulalume* and *The City in the Sea*.

In his essays on poetry he expressed his ardent enthusiasm for the mystical beauty that embodies the loftiest ideals of the soul, its immortal hopes and its purest and noblest feelings. 'An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is a sense of the Beautiful. But he who shall simply sing of the sights,

and sounds, and odours, and colours, and sentiments, which greet him in common with all mankind, has yet failed to prove his divine title. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us, but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic presence of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements appertain to eternity alone'. In his analysis of the principles of poetic composition he looks out for what is at the same time most essential and most elusive in art, i. e., for the cause of the irresistible appeal exercised by all masterpieces on the soul. He finds this occult motive in what he calls 'the mystic undercurrent'. The character of this hidden and suggestive element is clearly expressed in his objections to Coleridge's remarks about the different qualities of Fancy and Imagination. The distinction between these two intellectual faculties, so acutely investigated in the *Biographia Literaria*, is not accepted by Poe; for him the synthesis of Coleridge's discrimination: 'Fancy combines, Imagination creates', does not include any substantial difference; neither creates, since the human mind cannot imagine anything that does not exist in reality; the aspect of novelty, which strikes us in the so-called imaginative creation, arises from mere novelty of combination. The true distinction—and a distinction only in degree—lies in 'the consideration of the mystic'. 'Mystic' may be called a composition in which there is 'beneath the transparent current of meaning, an under or

suggestive one'; the mystic element lifts the conception into the ideal. In *The Sensitive Plant* 'there is little of fancy, and everything of imagination; with each note of the lyre is heard a ghostly, and, not always a distinct, but an august and soul-exalting echo; in every glimpse of beauty presented, we catch, through long and wild vistas, dim bewildering visions of a far more ethereal beauty beyond'.

'A tint of sadness' is inseparably connected with all the highest manifestations of Beauty; and, Beauty being the true province of poetry, the *tone* of all really deep and noble poetry must be instinct with melancholy.

It must also be observed that Poe dwells several times in his critical writings and in his tales — notably in *Ligeia* — on the truth of Bacon's aphorism, that Beauty is always accompanied by a certain *strangeness*.

Poe is not only concerned with the spiritual element in art, but also with the technicalities of verse. His theories on metre are expounded in the essay *The Rationale of Verse*. Verse, and all its characteristics: rhythm, measure, stanza, rhyme, alliteration, refrain, originate from 'the enjoyment of equality'. — The rudiment of verse is the spondee; but, as an equal measure would engender a sense of monotony, there arises the necessity of varying the metrical unity, *uniformity* being the principle, *variety* the principle's safeguard from self-destruction by excess of self. — From the succession of a series of the same feet would also arise a sense of monotony; hence the necessity of curtailing the series into parts, i. e., lines, which, in order to answer to the wish for equality, must have an equal number of feet; but, for variety's sake, dif-

ferent feet may be used in a single line, the predominant character remaining, however, unaltered. — Rhyme arises from the want of defining the lines to the ear by means of the termination, and the strophic division from a proportional equality of number among lines.

To Poe — a temperament of musician rather than of painter — verse was rather a source of suggestive melodies than a casket of visionary gems. His lines are overladen with harmony, as Shelley's and Keats's with colour. 'It is in music', he says, 'that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the poetic sentiment, it struggles, — the creation of supernal Beauty'. And he tried to transfer the soul of music into his poetry.

On Swinburne's

Atalanta in Calydon.

Atalanta in Calydon is the strange fruit of a mind imbued and enriched with classic thought and at the same time influenced by the ideals of Preraphaelitism. As an interpreter of life, Swinburne looks at the world through the sombre glass of Hellenic pessimism, being equally far from the mystic serenity of Wordsworth and the ardent optimism of Browning. A close imitation of the Greek drama is manifest throughout the play; yet, as in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, the poet's original freshness of inspiration remains untouched; here we have not an attempt to copy what is inimitable, but to renew, according to modern aesthetic aspirations, the tragic dream of a heroic age and an ancient literary form.

The essential subject of the play is the tragic struggle between man and fate. The gods themselves, in spite of their apparent strength, are under the control of the mystic laws of destiny; human passions afford them the means to accomplish their revenge, but both gods and men are at the same time the instruments

and the victims of a supreme, inexorable power. The sudden wrath of Althaea is not only the cause of Meleager's death, but the manifestation of the inevitable fulfilment of fate. According to the pagan conception which forms the groundwork of the play, its true 'dramatis personae' are, — rather than its characters, — the dark might of destiny, the vindictive anger of the gods, and the blind passions of men. The tragedy is substantially symbolical, the mythic argument being exalted into an allegoric representation of the sad fate of man ; the sufferings of the personages are not considered as individual griefs, but as the august sorrows of the human soul, as the universal misery and distress of mankind under the sway of merciless rulers. The poet's aim is to represent the world as it appeared, flashing in splendour and terror, before the Hellenic mind ; the drama, however, draws its vital strength from being, under the veil of a Greek myth, the utterance of the author's inmost belief, of his rebellion against the obscure and supreme powers of destiny. This pessimistic conception of life was deeply rooted in Swinburne's heart, and lingers throughout his work ; *Atalanta in Calydon* is the wild outbreak of his hatred against the mysterious agencies of fate. This wind of revolt is the spirit pulsing at the core of a tragedy in which man works out his own destruction led by the crafty devices of an unknown force. As Shelley in his *Prometheus Unbound*, he finds a bitter pleasure in throwing, from the voluntary darkness in which he plunged himself, flaming darts against the sombre phantom created by his own mind. His hate attains its highest expression in the choric songs ;

Not as with sundering of the earth
 Nor as with cleaving of the sea...
 Fate, mother of desires and fears,
 Bore unto men the law of tears;
 But sudden, an unfathered flame,
 And broken out of night, she shone,
 She, without body, without name,
 In days forgotten and foregone; ...
 Clouds and great stars, thunders and snows, ...
 The life that breathes, the life that grows, ...
 Even all these knew her: for she is great;
 The daughter of doom, the mother of death,
 The sister of sorrow; a lifelong weight
 That no man's finger lighteneth,
 Nor any god can lighten, fate (1).

A parallel conception occurs in *Poems and Ballads*
 [1st series, pp. 96-99] and in a gorgeously elaborated
 passage of *Tristram of Lyonesse*;

Fate, that was born ere spirit and flesh were made, ...
 The power beyond all godhead which puts on
 All forms of multitudinous unison,
 A raiment of eternal change inwrought
 With shapes and hues more subtly spun than thought,
 Where all things old bear fruit of all things new
 And one deep chord throbs all the music through, ...
 Fate, higher than heaven and deeper than the grave,
 That saves and spares not, spares and doth not save, ...
 Whose judgment into no god's hand is given [p. 133].

The ancient soul rebelled against the mystery of
 death; death was not the realm of peace, or even of
 everlasting forgetfulness, but the entrance to a world
 of twilight sadness, where melancholy shadows are
 roaming on pale asphodel fields, or wailing, oppressed

(1) *Poetical Works*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1905. IV, 312.

with mournful remembrances, by nocturnal streams (1); therefore the hero's soul yearns to be dissolved in the universal life of nature, in the restless winds, in the tumultuous surges. Yet beauty sits on the pallor of death :

O thy luminous face,
Thine imperious eyes!
O the grief, o the grace,
As of day when it dies!

It is not Keats' desire to die in the ecstatic contemplation of beauty, in a rapture of impassioned song, but a wish for unconscious death, for a rapid passage from the world of men and strife to the world of shadows and eternal calm.

Love and hatred are the main springs of the plot, — love, a delicate tree putting forth evil blossoms from its silvery, slender boughs, — hatred, a wild, consuming flame. The poet's violent condemnation of love is one of the leading strains in his impassioned rhapsody. Love is fair, but the source of ruin and death:

Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of desire;
And twain go forth beside thee, a man with a maid; ...
But Fate is the name of her; and his name is Death (2).

(1) Cf. in Bacchylides, the words of Meleager to Hercules:

μινύνθη δέ μοι ψυχὰ γλυκεῖα,
γυνῶν δ' ὀλιγοσθενέων·
αἰαῖ· πύματον δὲ πνέων δάκρυσα τλάμων
ἀγλαὰν ἦβαν προλείπων [V, 151].

(2) Cf. *Antigone*, 781:

"Ἐρως ἀνίκητε μάχαν, ...
καὶ σ' οὐτ' ἀθανάτων φύξιμος οὐδείς
οὔθ' ἀμερίων σὲ γ' ἀνθρώπων· ὁ δ' ἔχων μέμνηεν.

'Love, invincible in fight, none of the immortals can avoid

The conception of love as of a wicked, destructive power lingers throughout Swinburne's work ; it creates a turbid and poisonous atmosphere, which thickens around the glittering and sinister allegories of *Poems and Ballads*. Gazing intently on the events of human existence, the poet only descries in the gloom of mystery the medusae face of destiny ; life dissolves into a pageant of shadows, sorrow remaining the only reality ; love is no more the bond of soul to soul, but a cruel lure to bitterness and despair. The life of man is surrounded by the twofold mystery of birth and death ; the close of the 2nd chorus,

His life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep,

is an echo of Prospero's words :

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep [*Temp.* IV, I, 156].

But yet we perceive, side by side with this dark conception of death, the supreme need of faith in man's immortality in the glowing words uttered by Althaea, when she is speaking of the bliss attending the heroes' souls in the other world ; there they enjoy

Immortal honour, ... having past
To the clear seat and remote throne of souls,
Lands indiscoverable in the unheard-of west,
Round which the strong stream of a sacred sea
Rolls without wind for ever ; ...

thee and none of the ephemeral men ; but who has thee in his heart is possessed by madness'.

Sages and singers fiery from the god,
 Live there a life no liker to the gods;
 But nearer than their life of terrene days.
 Love thou such life and look for such a death (1).

In spite of his gloomy attitude of mind the poet knows how to blend the burning pathos and the fugitive joy of his personages, the pity and terror of dark events, into a perfect aesthetic harmony, pervading with intense splendour of beauty the whole structure of his work. An inmost elation is ringing throughout his song, an evident sign that the poet, as every consummate artist, holds an absolute control over his argument, — that his soul moves in a sphere of beauty, high above the crude reality of the plot. An impassive, unbroken serenity, — the result of a lofty aesthetic conception, — sheds its radiance over the whole tragedy, the sinister and cruel conflict of

(1) Cf. Pindar, *Olympian Odes*, II, 68 :

ἄσσοι δ' ἐτόλμασαν ἐστῆς
 ἐκατέρωθι μείναντες ἀπὸ πάμπαν ἀδίκων ἔχειν
 ψυχάν, ἔτειλαν Διὸς ὁδὸν παρὰ Κρόνου τύρσιν· ἔνθα μακάρων
 νᾶσος ὠκεανίδες
 αἶθραι περιπνέουσιν, ἄνθεμα δὲ χρυσοῦ φλέγει,
 τὰ μὲν χερσὸθεν ἀπ' ἀγλαῶν δεινδρέων, ὕδωρ δ' ἄλλα φέρβει,
 ὀρμιοὶ τῶν χέρας ἀναπλέκοντι καὶ στεφάνοις...

'But they who, dwelling in either world, have thrice been valiant in keeping their souls pure from all wrong, go by the road of Zeus to the tower of Cronus, where the sea-breezes blow around the islands of the blessed, and flowers of gold are flaming, some on the strand from radiant trees, others fostered by the water; and they wreath their hands with garlands and wreaths of them'.

hatred and love being thus refined into a vision of pure delight.

Every personage is illuminated by the imperious light of spiritual loveliness and grandeur ; Althaea, however, — the fierce, passionate woman, — is more finely wrought than the other characters, Atalanta being merely the unconscious instrument of destiny, Meleager the heroic victim, Oeneus the acquiescent soul. Only Althaea is given a prominent place in the drama by her gift of vision, her tragic wrath, her bitter taunts against fate and the gods ; her fiery speeches embody, better than any other passage in the play, except the choric songs, that spirit of desperate pessimism and angry revolt which is the gloomy base of the work. To her visionary soul, haunted by prophetic dreams, are revealed the hidden threads of the woof of events ; she deepens with sombre forebodings her torment and the unbearable pangs of remorse. It is owing to her intercourse with the hostile, invisible Powers, and to her stubborn fight against them, that she comes to be the true protagonist in whose soul the unequal battle is fought and lost, the symbolic representative of mankind's strife against fate.

The gods are many about me ; I am one.

Besides, in her tender love for Meleager shines at its best that poetry of childlife, of which Swinburne is the unrivalled master.

Meleager is the type of the warrior in heroic ages, a noble and pure 'flower of war'. His daring, undaunted soul reveals itself at first in his narrative of the sailing to the conquest of the Golden Fleece, and

then in the fight against the Northern tribes (1). — His lofty, impetuous spirit is impatient of baseness; with sudden assault he kills Althaea's brothers, Toxeus and Plexippus; yet in his heart burns a fervent and chaste love for Atalanta, and his dying speech is instinct with a deep, solemn pathos.

Atalanta, the fleet-footed huntress, the 'snowy-souled maid', glitters as a star among the cloudy, gloomy passions of the tragedy; but its light is pale and cold. Tenderness and love seem to be unknown to the heart of the virgin follower of Diana. Meleager, Althaea and her brothers are shaped with a wide apprehension of life, with a deep, Shakespearean insight in human nature; the poet fails, however, in the portraiture of Atalanta, making of her a creature aloof from man and his inheritance of sorrow, an abstraction of beauty, purity and grace rather than a person of flesh and blood. Even in the last scene, while Althaea falls into a frenzy of despair and inveigles against the powers which destroy her son, she does not show any deep pain, any heart-rending grief; sorrow appears only as a shadow on the limpid lake of her calm beauty, a shadow drawn like a grey veil over the azure, unruffled waters. Even when the poet makes her step out from the background, where she is usually kept, in the storm of the tragedy, he does so with a strange delicacy in his voice.

(1) For the conception of the hero's character in the Latin play of William Gager, *Meleager*, performed at Christ Church in 1581, printed in 1592, see F. S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age*. Oxford, 1914, p. 165 ff.

The sweetness of spring in thine hair, and the light in thine
[eyes

Thy face shall be no more fair at the fall of thy fate.
For thy life shall fall as a leaf and be shed as the rain;
And the veil of thine head shall be grief; and the crown
[shall be pain.

The two principal aesthetic elements, which, subtly interwoven, go to the making of the play, are the tragic beauty of man's destiny and the rapturous loveliness of nature. Yet even in nature the poet perceives an inmost tragedy, and the perishable magnificence of the world is for him instinct with the same pathos which he finds in the soul of man; a mournful hue is thus cast over the splendour of the earth. Summer comes, radiant, but 'with flowers that fell!' And spring 'shall be ruined with the rain, and storm eat up like fire the ashen autumn days'. No help comes to man from the serene, indifferent beauty of nature, except a soothing influence, which is admirably expressed in the luminous and fragrant interlude, combining an exuberant fancy and a strict realism in its rendering of 'natural magic'.

O that I now, I too were
By deep wells and water-floods,
Streams of ancient hills, and where
All the wan green places bear
Blossoms cleaving to the sod!...
There the year is sweet, and there
Earth is full of secret springs,
And the fervent rose-cheeked hours...
There are sunless, there look pale
In dim leaves and hidden air.

The same artifice of bringing freshness and light into the gloom of tragedy by means of the picture of

a sweet natural scene may be observed in *Oedipus at Colonus*, 670 :

ἐνθ'

ἃ λίγεια μινύρεται
θαμίζουσα μάλιστα ἀηδὼν
χλωραῖς ὑπὸ βάσσαις,
τὸν οἰνωπὸν ἔχουσα κισσὸν
καὶ τὰν ἄβατον θεοῦ]
φυλλάδα μυριόκαρπον ἀνῆλιον
ἀνήνεμόν τε πάντων
χειμώνων·
θάλλει δ' οὐρανίας ὑπ' ἄχνας
ὁ καλλιβοτρυς κατ' ἤμαρ αἰεὶ
νάρκισσος, μέγалаιν θεαῖν
ἀρχαῖον στεφάνομ', ὃ τε
χρυσανγῆς κρόκος· οὐδ' ἄνπνοι
κρῆναι μινύθουσιν
Κηφισοῦ νομάδες ῥεέθρων, ...

'where the harmonious nightingale mostly dwells, and sings in the green valleys, abiding continually in the wine-coloured ivy and the foliage of the inaccessible wood of the god, with myriads of fruits, without sun and sheltered from the wind of all storms ; — there the narcissus with fine bunches of flowers ever blows, day after day, fostered by the dew of heaven, an ancient crown of great goddesses ; there flourishes the crocus with golden glow ; and the sleepless, wandering sources of the Cephissus never dry up'.

Sea-poetry vivifies some splendid passages in Meleager's 'speech, when he relates how the bold navigators

saw through narrowing reefs

The lightning of the intolerable wave
Flash, and the white wet flame of breakers burn
Far under a kindling south-wind, as a lamp
Burns and bends all its blowing flame one way.

It is the same vivid sense of the poetry of the ocean,
which glows more deeply and widely in *Tristram of
Lyonesse*;

the quick sea shone
And shivered like spread wings of angels blown
By the sun's breath before him; and a low
Sweet gale shook all the foam-flowers of thin snow
As into rainfall of sea-roses shed
Leaf by wild leaf on that green garden-bed
Which tempests till and sea-winds turn and plough:
For rosy and fiery round the running prow
Fluttered the flakes and feathers of the spray,
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away
To waste on the ardent water [p. 26].

One of the most elaborate picture in the play,
painted with wonderful richness of colour and precision
of touch, occurs in the description of the place where
the warriors rest after having killed the monstrous
boar. With the passage in which Swinburne describes
the marshy ground where crouches the boar,

the green ooze of a sun-struck marsh
Shook with a thousand reeds untunable,

we may compare Ovid [*Metamorphoses*, VIII, where
the story of Atalanta is related at length, 260-525],

concava vallis erat, quo se demittere rivi
adsuerunt pluvialis aquae; tenet ima lacunae
lenta salix... iuncique palustres
viminae et longa parvae sub harundine cannae [334].

Compare also the picture of Atalanta,

from her white braced shoulder the plumed shafts
Rang, and the bow shone from her side,

with

ex umero pendens resonabat eburnea laevo
telorum custos, arcum quoque laeva tenebat [320];

and the death of Ancaeus, struck by the boar,

and as flakes of weak-winged snow
Break, all the hard thews of his heaving limbs
Broke, and rent flesh fell every way, and blood
Flew, and fierce fragments of no more a man;

concidit Ancaeus glomerataque sanguine multo
viscera lapsa fluunt; madefacta est terra cruore [401].

The fortitude of Meleager in death is also hinted at by Ovid,

magnos superat virtute dolores [517].

His dramatic gift manifests itself not only in the general conception of his work, but also in the shaping of the allegoric images which adorn the speeches of the personages and the lyrics sung by the chorus. The same tragic power we observe in the treatment of passion shines out in the pageant of symbolic figures; they emerge in the same fitful splendour, in the stormy play of light and shadow which enwraps the characters; there is an inmost tragedy in each of his allegories, and the contradictory traits of the personages' souls are mirrored in them. There is under their brilliancy the presage of a brooding storm, there is in them the same strange chord of terror and beauty, of pity and revolt, and the same strain of sorrow which runs through the hearts of the characters; they have, in their fantastic richness, a close intimacy with the argument. They are not cold abstractions, but real

beings, and, in no less degree than his personages, reveal the poet's creative energy and his sensibility to the pathos of human life. The grim and glorious imagery is not the product of a mind overpowered by the excess of fantasy, by the spell of merely ornamental beauty; it does not surround the play as a glittering frame, but is intimately interwoven with the central figures. His metaphors too are kindled with intellectual light, and are not the vain flowers of a ground where fancy is allowed to run riot, but they impress us with a sense of intense joy and pain clothed in beauty. Thus in the veiled language used by Althaea when addressing the souls of her dead brothers and hinting at her vengeance :

For ye shall have such wood to funeral fire
As no king hath, ... much costlier than fine gold,
And more than many lives of wandering men.

In several scenes the fitness of the form, the refined word-music cannot redeem the faults of prolixity and declamation ; but, while in the long-drawn speeches of Althaea concentration of utterance is often wanting, in the dialogues we meet with that brevity and pungency of expression, which are characteristic of the Greek *συγχωρδία*. Yet even this overflow and superabundance of discourse is full of lyric passion and adorned with rich imagery. The monotony is relieved by strange and beautiful similes. New and striking epithets occur in the descriptive passages and increase the graphic power of his style ; so that his terse and vivid expression makes the world of vision as wellnigh tangible as the real world. To cite an example especially illustrative and significant of this

style fusing the inmost energy of conception with an exquisite grace, let us quote the passage :

What shall be done with all these tears of ours?
 Shall they make watersprings in the fair heaven
 To bathe the brows of morning? or like flowers
 Be shed and shine before the starriest hours,
 Or made the raiment of the weeping seven?

The characteristic glow of his imagination is seen particularly in the metaphors, as in the picture of the firebrand bursting into flowers of flame [p. 257], while the originality of his creative energy shows at its best in such passages displaying the gifts of a mind sensitive alike to a sombre grandeur and to a dreamy grace, as the second Chorus, or in such ecstatic outbursts of song as the address to Spring:

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her?
 For the stars and the winds are unto her
 As raiment...

In 1861, during his travel in Italy, he made the acquaintance of Walter Savage Landor, whose enthusiastic admiration for Greek art and literature exercised no doubt a strong influence on the young poet. To W. S. Landor *Atalanta in Calydon* is dedicated (1). But even since he was studying at Balliol College, the great scholar Jowett had noticed his genial comprehension of the Hellenic mind and of its aesthetic manifestations. In this play he gives us not a vain echo, but the spirit itself of Greek dramatic poetry;

(1) See his *Song for the Centenary of W. S. Landor* [*Poet. Works*, V, 7].

symmetrical elegance of Leighton's compositions, in the attitudes of Moore's allegorical figures and in Walter Crane's drawings. The classic world was an alluring mirage to D. G. Rossetti and to William Morris. We observe the same tendency in Swinburne; his poetry is further influenced by the Romantic ideals of the Preraphaelites. To Burne-Jones is dedicated the first series of *Poems and Ballads*, where we remark, in the descriptive parts, a Preraphaelite liking for minute and vividly coloured details; but the chief source of inspiration is Rossetti's tragic conception of love; the cruel smile of the symbolic figures is derived from the glamour of wickedness and loveliness of Rossetti's visages. Already in some traits of *Atalanta in Calydon* burns the sombre passion of the poet of *Sister Helen* and *Troy Town*; for instance, in the fateful and sinister character of the heroine's beauty:

She, the strange woman, she the flower, the sword,
Red from spilt blood, a mortal flower to men,
Adorable, detestable.

In his lines the Hellenic splendour of imagination blending with a Romantic pathos gives a result not dissimilar from the fine effects of bright colouring and deep melancholy obtained by Tennyson in such poems as *Oenone* and *Tithonus*. Swinburne dreamed perhaps an art which should blend the grandeur of Phidias with the subtlety of Botticelli. — Besides, there is in his form a heady perfume distilled from the flowers of Elizabethan poetry, so that his style, as lucid as white marble in its classic simplicity, is interspersed with veins of brilliant ore, and we find quaint metaphors and similes scattered among his limpid phrases. As an

example of Elizabethan richness of fantasy in the development of the image we suggest the description of Meleager's helmet [p. 257], in which the abundant elegance of Spenser is joined to a Marlovian force and glow of colour [cf. *Tamburlaine*, P. 2, 4095 ff.].

We clearly perceive the various ways in which the classical drama may be appreciated, when we compare Swinburne's play with the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley; both poets are looking at the wonderful achievements of the Hellenic genius, but from a wholly different standpoint. Shelley borrowed from the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles their inmost spirit, while Swinburne adhered more strictly to their exterior form and structure; yet the former conveyed through his work his optimistic message of ultimate happiness for Man and Nature, and the latter set as a basis to his play the pessimistic conception of the Greek dramatists. Besides, Swinburne does not attain in *Atalanta in Calydon* the exquisite originality and the ethereal glow of Shelley in the elaboration of the image, the spirituality and delicate splendour that we see for instance in the Fury's speech:

'As from the rose which the pale priestess kneels
To gather from her festal crown of flowers
The aerial crimson falls, flushing her cheek,
So from our victim's destined agony
The shade which is our form invests us round,
Else we are shapeless as our mother Night'.

Atalanta in Calydon was published in 1865, when the poet was twenty-eight years of age; upwards of forty years more of intense activity were reserved for the expansion of his genius both in lyric and in dramatic poetry; but the splendour of this tragedy

remained unsurpassed. Nor was it excelled by a drama of the same character, *Erechtheus*, which he published in 1876; it lacks the lofty inspiration, the deep pathos, it is shorn of the far-stretching radiance which we admire in the earlier play. Nevertheless *Atalanta in Calydon* does not attain the supreme heights of poetry, because it lacks 'mystery', that depth of thought and passion 'which passeth show', and cannot be clearly expressed even by the greatest masters of art, but which is admirably suggested in their loftiest passages; we do not meet here with such ever-remembered, far-reaching lines, weaving words laden with numberless suggestions into a supernal song, as in Dante or Shakespeare. We admire in Swinburne's work not so much the depth of thought as the passion for beauty; the unflagging fervour of his inspiration running throughout the play, the passionate utterance, the magic of the verbal music, show the sublime elation of a soul which moves in a radiant dream, reveal him as a true poet, a 'dweller among visions'.

Stéphane Mallarmé.

The undercurrent of meaning, to which Poe alludes in his essay *The Philosophy of Composition*, has become the essential element in Mallarmé's poetry, the vital principle holding together their beautiful but apparently unconnected images. He adopted a manner of expression blending sensations and emotions into a forcible and impressive whole, not unlike the form that Verlaine has used in such vague and suggestive lyrics as *Crépuscule du Soir Mystique* and the quaint stanzas beginning 'Je devine, à travers un murmure, — Le contour subtil des voix anciennes', in *Romances sans paroles*. There is indeed a kind of euphuism in the style of his works, in which striking thoughts flash through the thickly-woven intricacy of metaphors; the images appear to us surrounded by a quivering halo, as if by the pale radiance cast up from moonlit waves. In his lyrics, in his *Poèmes en prose*, in the essays collected under the title of *Divagations*, in his translation of Poe's poems, he employed the same elaborateness, the same preciousness, which had a strong appeal for the younger generation. Several French and Belgian poets followed in his wake; in Fontainas'

Estuaires d'Ombre, for example, unmistakable traces of Mallarmé's symbolism show themselves almost on every page; likewise in Lerberghe's spiritual melodies his influence is clearly seen. His influence is also perceptible, in art, in such exquisite and enigmatic works as Fernand Khnopff's *Incense, the Prisoner, Dreamer*, — and, in music, in the strange harmonies of Debussy's interpretation of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*.

The world had no meaning to him; it was merely an arabesque of strange, haunting beauty. Consequently there is a curious detachment in his way of looking at life; we meet with no passionate interest, no inquisitiveness, but with an impassible contemplation of a magnificent pageant. Beautiful figures in purple and gold — the gold of Joy, the dark purple of Pain — are wandering through the forest of Illusion; all around is darkness and the mystery of Death. He seems to watch the ebb and flow of passion with cold, impassive eyes, as if conscious of the futility of all things but of dreams. Shut away from the tumult of life, living in a world of his own, he gets only faint glimpses of material things; and he tried to build above the actual world an abstract world of thought, where a floating perfume, a whisper, a poignant cadence, a delicate shade of colour, were the only remains of reality. But in his ideal universe he felt acutely alone; this sense of solitude is supreme in his mind, and inspired to him perhaps the most splendid, and the saddest, of his lines.

Mallarmé's chief claim to distinction among the Symbolists is that he expressed with supreme melancholy and sweetness the loneliness of the poet caused

not only by the incomprehension of the crowd, but, above all, by the impossibility to manifest his dream, by the transcendental character of beauty. Beauty, according to Mallarmé's conception, is a divine Idea, whose true abode is another sphere; she appears to us only as a shadow, the contemplation of perfect beauty being out of the reach of the human soul. In *Hérodiade* — where the Princess is the symbol of beauty, and the Nurse of the soul — the latter says: 'You are alive! or do I see here the shade of a princess?' An analogous thought occurs in Shelley's *Hymn to intellectual beauty*,

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats though unseen among us; ...
Like aught that for its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.

And the same notion is echoed in Spenser's *Hymn in honour of beauty* from Plato,

perfect beauty, which all men adore,
Whose face and feature doth so much excell
All mortal sense, that none the same may tell.

In the concept of Plato all loveliness on earth is but a shadow of an absolute beauty. Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, says that wisdom is the loveliest of all ideas; and the figure of Wisdom in Spenser's *Hymn to heavenly beauty* foreshadows in a certain way the image of the French poet.

There in his bosom Sapience doth sit,
The sovereign darling of the Deity,
Clad like a queen in royal robes, most fit
For so great power and peerless majesty,

And all with gems and jewels gorgeously
Adorned, that brighter than the stars appear,
And make her native brightness seem more clear.

When the Nurse wishes to pay homage to her mistress she is forbidden to do it.

'Nurse. Grant to my lips your fingers and their rings.

Hérodias. Keep back. A kiss would kill me, if Beauty were not Death'.

All art, being an aspiration to beauty, a suggestion of a world beyond the world, is a yearning, through death, to eternity. We find a similar conception in Francis Thompson's *Mistress of Vision*;

Her song said that no springing
Paradise but evermore
Hangeth on a singing
That has chords of weeping,
And that sings the after-sleeping
To souls that wake too sore.

'But woe the singer, woe!' she said; '*beyond the dead his*
[singing lore]'.

The passage into another region free from the stain of mortality — the realm of beauty — is powerfully expressed in the XX. strophe of the same poem;

Die, for none other way canst live.

When earth and heaven lay down their veil,
And that apocalypse turns thee pale;
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see;
When their sight to thee is sightless;
Their living, death; their light, most lightless;

Search no more,

Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.

This yearning is already apparent in Baudelaire, in the 'poème en prose' *Anywhere out of the world*, in which the soul, unsatisfied with the mirage of foreign countries, cries at last to the poet: 'It does not matter where, provided it be out of this world!' — and in *The Voyage*: 'Death, old captain, it is time; let us weigh anchor. This land bores us; o Death, let us get under sail! If sky and sea are as black as ink, our hearts, well-known to you, are filled with bright rays. We wish to dive to the bottom of the abyss, to the inmost depth of the unknown to find something new!'

Beauty is an exile on earth, and she is astonished to find herself surrounded by its perishable loveliness. 'By what charms', asks Hérodiade, 'have I been lured to this world? What morning sheds its sad magnificence over the dying horizons?' She is afraid of her exile; why is she here? what for? And she feels utterly alone, living by herself, unapproachable, unprofitable to men, like many radiant and useless things. She is immortal, and, remembering her native heaven, desires to keep her splendour inviolate, to preserve the reflection of the eternal gems of the palace where she was born. 'I dream of exiles; — the golden torrent of my immaculate hair is everlasting, and I want my hair, that has mirrored you, jewels of my natal wall, to retain the sterile coldness of metal in its cruel flashes and dull pallors'. She is insensible to human distress, in her serene, unreachable glow; 'my hairs are not flowers to shed oblivion to human pain'.

Beauty wishes to see herself reflected in a mirror, the mirror of Art; in vain. How often has she sought

the memories of her heavenly life in the grace of aesthetic works! She descried herself in them only as a faint, elusive shadow, since Art cannot fully grasp, much less express, beauty. Human visions are not allowed to attain perfect loveliness; and, even in their finest productions, in their supreme efforts — poems, paintings, statues, music — men draw but a frail, tarnished image of beauty. Then, in despair, Hérodiade is conscious at last of the vanity of all their endeavours, of the gulph between herself and mankind; all her dreams are inaccessible to the soul of man. ‘O mirror, chilly water frozen by weariness in your frame, how many times, and for hours and hours, sick of dreaming, and looking for my remembrances, that are like dead leaves under the deep hole of your crystal, I appeared to myself as a shadow far away!’

Beauty is therefore surrounded by utter loneliness.

‘*Nurse*. And for whom do you keep, devoured by anguish, the unknown effulgence and the vain mystery of your being?’

Hérodiade. For myself.

Nurse. Sad is the flower that grows solitary, and has no other emotion but to behold with atony its own shade in the water’.

And then Hérodiade breaks out into an impassioned outburst, one of the highest flights of the poet’s genius. ‘Yes, it is for myself, only for myself, that I blossom, all alone! You know it, gardens of amethyst, buried for ever in dazzled abysses, — you, hidden gold, keeping your ancient glow beneath the dark sleep of primeval earth, — you, precious stones, from which my eyes, limpid jewels, borrow their melodious clarity, — and

you, metals, that give a fatal radiance and a heavy flow to my young hair!'

We observe in him that strange discontent which Walter Pater has so subtly analysed in his portrait of Watteau; an infinite sadness is lurking behind his gorgeous visions, and all his songs are in a minor tone. His enigmatic work is like the ivory face of Medusa, framed by tangles of golden snakes; we are lured to scan her changeful smile, to wring the secret from her pale lips; she, sphinx-like, seems to withhold for ever the mystery of her life. Yet he felt a yearning, vague, but intense, towards the Infinite and the Eternal. 'I go', he says in *Les Fenêtres*, 'to all the windows from which I may turn my shoulders to life; and there, close to the glass washed with eternal dews, gilt by the chaste morning of the Infinite, I behold myself turned into a higher being, carrying my dream as a diadem, — in the antenatal skies where beauty is blossoming for ever'. For him the beauty of nature could only be appreciated through the medium of art or when transfigured by immortal hopes;

Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité.

His aesthetic ecstasies were so intense that they revealed to him an everlasting realm of Beauty, as if the real firmament were looped back from our 'mortal mornings grey'. His soul is vainly trying to know herself among the elusive reflections of fleeting images.

The poet's aspiration to supernal beauty is symbolised in *L'Azur*. The azure of heaven is for Mallarmé, as for Baudelaire, the symbol of purity, of the haunting ideal. 'The serene irony of the eternal blue, indolently

beautiful like the flowers, overwhelms the strengthless poet, who curses his genius while crossing a sterile desert of sorrows. I flee, with closed eyes, and yet I feel it looking at my soul with the intensity of a crushing remorse. — Arise, fogs! pour out your monotonous ashes, with long tatters of mist, and build up a great silent ceiling. And you, dear Weariness, come out of the Lethæan pools, gathering slime and pale reeds, and stop with unwearied hand the large blue holes that birds tear open maliciously in this roof. O Matter, give me oblivion of the cruel ideal and of sin. — I pray in vain. The azure is triumphing, and I hear it singing in the bells; it makes itself a voice and peals out of the living metals in the blue chimes of the Angelus! We may compare with these lines what Baudelaire says in one of his *Poèmes en prose*: 'Inimitable chastity of the blue! — The depth of heaven strikes me with dismay, and I feel enraged at its limpidity. Ah! must one eternally writhe in pain or for ever flee from the Beautiful?' — and in the sonnet *L'aube spirituelle*: 'When the white and vermilion dawn, with the corrosive ideal, enters the room of a libertine, an angel awakes in the slumbering brute. Before him the inaccessible azure of the spiritual heavens opens and deepens with the fascination of an abyss'.

Mallarmé shares with Verlaine and other writers of this group the conception of an adverse fate in the poet's life. Already, in *Ténèbres*, one of their leaders had stated this idea;

Sur son trône d'airain, le Destin qui s'en raille,
 Imbibe leur éponge avec du fiel amer,
 Et la Nécessité les tord dans sa tenaille.

‘ On his throne of bronze, Destiny, laughing at them, imbibes for them a sponge with bitter gall, and Necessity wrings them in her pincers ’. — Verlaine adopted and developed it in his essays *Les poètes maudits*; the title of his *Poèmes saturniens* refers to these people born under an evil star, ‘ Saturne, astre fauve, cher aux nécromanciens ’; in the lyric *Grotesques* he describes these ill-fated artists and points out the reason of the hatred against them; ‘ they are abhorred because in their eyes smiles and weeps, fastidious to the vulgar, the love of eternal things ’. Mallarmé, in *Le Guignon*, shows us the evil genius that drives his ill-starred friends to calamity and disaster. ‘ The wild hair of the beggars of Azure, who tread our earthly roads, floated in sudden flashes above the haggard herd of men. Always with the hope of reaching the sea, they travelled without bread, staff or urn, biting the golden citron of the bitter ideal. And most of them died in sombre mountain passes, only death kissing their silent lips ’. That is: the radiant dreams of poets craving for ideal beauty, and yet doomed to live among us, shone far above the crowd engaged in low pursuits; with an unconquerable hope of beholding at last the vision of the infinite, they dragged their days without comfort, support or relief, trying to get their nourishment from the splendid fruit of their mind; and most of them met with a lonely, inglorious end. ‘ Roaming in the wilderness, they run before the whip of an angry monarch, their wicked destiny; full of wrath, they turn and challenge the perverse king, only to drive their rusty rapier through a mocking carcass ’. ‘ Why ’, exclaims the poet in despair, ‘ why do not these luckless heroes put on the

scarlet rags of charlatans to attract the mob?' A parallel conception he expresses in a sonnet where he compares the poet to a swan imprisoned in a frozen lake. 'Its neck strives to shake off the white agony, but the bird shall never rise from the horror of the ice in which its plumage is caught. Phantom-like, assigned to this place by its pure splendour, the Swan becomes motionless in the cold dream of disdain that enfolds it in its useless exile'. The poet writhes in agony among uncongenial surroundings; but, conscious at last of the vanity of his efforts, becomes insensible to the cold indifference and contempt of the crowd. He was certainly very different from those artists, who, greedy of notice, endeavour to force their personalities upon us. As no concession to the popular taste is conceivable in such a fine writer as Mallarmé, this complaint sounds strange indeed, and it is truly characteristic of a dreamer. Nobody in fact who has a clear vision of reality can for a moment entertain the hope that these rare and beautiful dreams may be understood, much less appreciated, by the crowd.

This conception was further enhanced, in the case of Mallarmé, by the reluctance to reveal his poetical dreams; in his essay on *Hamlet*, the hero assumes for him a special significance, becomes the symbol of a delicate soul that shrinks instinctively from showing its true self to the mob. This character is to him the synthesis of an inward drama; the poet is torn between the impulse of destiny compelling him to appear before the world, and his yearning for secrecy. 'Hamlet represents a personage with an intimate occult tragedy, that is, the adolescent, who

vanished from us at the beginning of life, and who shall haunt all pensive and lofty minds with the mourning garments which he pleases to wear. I recognise in him the emblem of the man who writhes in pain under the fatal evil of having to show himself to the world'.

His poems-in-prose intermingle the homely with the rare, — his conception of the difference between this form and verse being that verse is only to deal with the noblest and highest ideas while the poem-in-prose blends ordinary life with dream. In these pieces, narrow in compass and yet opening vast perspectives of vision, the objects that give them their titles are mere pretexts or starting-points; the fantastic element comes in unexpectedly, as the poet follows the thread of suggestion. *The Pipe* is the analysis of a trick of memory. He finds his pipe, and, throwing away the cigarettes, lights it, 'like a serious man, who, to work in a better way, wants to smoke for a long while, without trouble'. 'But I had not foreseen the surprise that this forgotten creature had in store for me. As soon as I blew out the first whiff, I cleanly forgot the great books that I intended to write; I had not touched this faithful friend since my return, and London — such a London as I had felt, living alone, entirely by myself, one year ago — appeared to me. I saw again a sombre room, its furniture, sprinkled with coal dust, on which sprawled the lean black cat, the great fires, and the housemaid pouring out coal in the iron grate, at morning — when the postman struck the solemn double knock that made me live! I have seen again through the window those sickly trees of the desert square, and the sea, and myself shivering on

the steamer's deck, with my beloved in her long grey mantle. — And round her neck fluttered the terrible handkerchief that is waved when we say farewell and part for ever'. In *Winter Shiver* he obtains the calculated effect by means of a skilful arrangement of details. *The Water-lily* is a pretext to show how he prefers dream to reality; he has rowed for a long time on the river, and now he is near the park of a lady to whom he has to take a message; suddenly he hears a slight noise; perhaps the lady is coming and her beauty may fascinate his soul. 'What am I to do, my dream? — To sum up at a glance the virginal absence diffused in this solitude and — as, to remember a place, somebody plucks one of these magic water-lilies, closed, enfolding with their hollow whiteness a nothing made of inviolate dreams of a happiness that shall never exist — gather one of these flowers and leave the place'.

The most exquisite among these little masterpieces is doubtlessly *Autumn Plaint*. 'Ever since Mary left me for another star — Orion, Altair, or is it you, green Venus? — I have always cherished solitude. How many a long day have I whiled away, alone, with my cat! By 'alone' I mean 'without a material being', and my cat is a mystic companion, a spirit. Thus I have spent long days *alone* with my cat, and, *alone*, with one of the authors of the Latin decadence; for, since the white lady is no more, strangely and curiously I have loved all that is summed up in this word: fall. Therefore the last languishing summer days are my favourite season, and the hour in which I take a walk is when the sun lingers over the horizon before vanishing away, and casts rays of yellow copper

on the grey walls and of red copper on the window-panes. Likewise I love the writers of the Roman decadence. I was reading one of these dear poems — whose spots of rouge have for me a greater charm than the incarnate of youth — when a barrel-organ began to sing, languid and melancholy, beneath my window. It was playing in the avenue of poplars, the leaves of which seem dismal to me even in Spring, since Mary passed there, accompanied by lighted tapers, for the last time. In the twilight of remembrance the barrel-organ made me dream desperately. It played an old-fashioned, banal air, and yet I enjoyed it slowly, and I did not get up to throw a penny out of the window, lest I chanced to see that the instrument did not sing by itself'.

It is an autumnal world; he stands on the threshold of a garden, of which he shares the serene melancholy; the sun is like a gleaming topaz, and the breeze is sighing mournfully through the groves dimmed by the chilly incense of October; dead leaves fall lightly on the shivering lake, on the last flowers: chrysanthemums of curled amber, frail roses around the pale amethyst of a pond, verbenas that the sunset rays seem to have stained with a fiery dye. A forest — red-gold in the slanting sunbeams, dusky bronze in the violet shadow — sleeps in the distance; a mystic, yearning melody, like the song of a lonely star, floats on the wind, filling his mind with visions. — 'My soul, o calm sister, ascends toward your brows and the moving sky of your angelic eyes, as, in a melancholy garden, a faithful, white fountain-jet rises, sighing, toward the azure, — the tender blue of pale and pure October that mirrors in the large basins

its infinite languor, and lets trail on the dead water, where the wandering agony of ruddy leaves driven by the breeze traces a cold furrow, a long yellow sunbeam'.

There he has built his 'Palace of Art', an edifice of lapislazuli and gold, supported by slender columns of polished bronze around which are twined exotic flowers. To read his poems is like entering a sumptuous hall, where cups inlaid with Byzantine enamels and slim iridescent glasses stand on a table of onyx mirroring on its veined surface the painted ceiling. He is fond of the factitious grace, of the quaint refinement of an Arcadia of the XVIII. century as well as of the bizarre fancies of Japanese art.

The preciousity of his inspiration may be seen in some of his sonnets in octosyllabics, in the lines, for instance, on Mademoiselle Mallarmé's fan; the fan is speaking: 'O dreamer, learn how to keep my wing in your hand, so as to plunge me into pure delight, without roving away as a bird's wing would like to do; — a twilight freshness breathes on you at every fluttering of my wing; and, when I am folded up, I am like a sceptre that you place against the fires — gold and gems — of your bracelet'. Not only this preciousity, but even a certain 'mièvrerie', characteristic of the XVIII. century, appears in the sonnet *Placet futile*: 'Princess, call me the shepherd of your smiles, so that fan-winged Love may paint me, a flute in my hands, lulling to sleep this sheepfold'.

Curiously enough at first sight, but as a natural reaction to the artificiality of his style and the complexity of modern life, we see in Mallarmé a wish for a method of art extremely simplified and for

serenity in the conception of existence. He expressed it in the lines beginning: 'Las de l'amer repos'. 'Weary of the bitter rest, by which my idleness offends a glory — for which I once forsook the adorable infancy of the woods of roses under the natural azure — I will leave aside the greedy Art of a cruel land. Smiling at the old reproaches of my friends, of the past, of my genius, I wish to imitate a Chinese artist. His heart is limpid and refined, and his pure ecstasy is to paint, on cups as white as snow stolen from the moon, a bizarre flower that perfumes his transparent life, the flower he has felt, when a child, grafting itself to the blue filigree of his soul. And, serenely, I am going to choose a simple landscape; a blue, thin, pale line should suggest a lake, the sky being represented by the bare porcelain; the clear crescent of the moon, partly lost in a white cloud, dips its horn in the mirror of waters, not far from three great eyelashes of emerald, that stand for three reeds'. Which is to say: Weary of my laziness that frustrates my dream of poetical fame, for which once I left a simple life and the contemplation of natural beauty, I will leave aside the strange, complex style of our Western art, greedy of new impressions, — without minding at all the criticism of friends, the example of ancient poet, and my inspiration. I shall imitate Eastern art; I dream of a new style in poetry, clear and sober; only a few details will suffice to paint an ideal, placid landscape.

He was deeply interested in the relations between music and poetry; both try to disentangle an outline of harmony from the mystic arabesque of the universe; but in the former we miss a supreme element, the

idea. 'Music and Literature', he says (1), 'are the same face of the soul; but in music this visage is dark, in literature translucent with thought, luminous with the brightness of the Idea'. Both tend to the pure 'idea' of a thing, not at the thing itself with specified and individual characters; yet in poetry the idea is manifested and definitely outlined, while music only expresses the emotion stirred by it. 'I utter the word 'flower', and, out of the oblivion to which my voice relegates all shapes different from the blossoms known to me, musically and suavely rises the very idea of a flower, of the flower absent from all bouquets'. It is commonly believed that Mallarmé identifies verse with music; on the contrary, as we have just seen, he distinguishes between the tune without words and the song endowed with ideas; music is independent of thought, poetry is not. The musical character that marks his lines, where melody is certainly an intrinsic power and not a mere ornament, is rather due to his wish to absorb into poetry the elements of music. A quotation from his *Divagation, relativement au vers*, furnishes the best commentary to this statement. 'We are now just about to seek the art of transposing the symphony into the book, thus taking back our own property [music]; because it is not from the elemental sonorities of brass-, string- and wind-instruments, but from the word charged with thought at its highest degree [poetry], that music — understood as the ensemble of the relations existing among all things — must result'.

(1) *La Musique et les Lettres*; a lecture held at Cambridge and at Pembroke College, Oxford.

Some of his poems seem indeed to re-echo the mystical delicacy and intensity of pathos of Chopin and Schumann; a musical glamour enwraps his ethereal figures half-seen in the twilight, Seraphim bending over their sobbing viols among vapoury flowers, their eyes holding in their blue depths the gleam of stars. 'The moon was growing sad. Some dreaming Seraphim, in tears, drew from their dying viols, in the calm of vapoury flowers, white sobs that lightly swept over the blue chalices; — my reverie, loving to torment me, subtly inebriated itself with the perfume of that sadness, which — even without regret or disillusion — the realisation of a dream leaves in the heart of the dreamer. — And with sunlight in your hair, at evening, you appeared, smiling, to me in the street, and I thought to see the bright-hooded fairy, who once passed in my dreams letting snow down from her half-closed hands white bouquets of perfumed stars'.

He strove to capture the most elusive impressions, to isolate and intensify them; and, like tinklings of a fairy harp, his exquisite strains succeed in evoking those faint, delicate images which hover on the verge of consciousness — symbols and tokens of half-forgotten joys and sorrows. He was an artist extremely sensitive to all the capacities of expression afforded by the medium he chose; he found out accordingly new suggestions in the sounds and musical arrangement of words. Sometimes, looking at pictures, we feel, in spite of the limitation of colour and line, a musical impression, chiefly because they are endowed with the nostalgic pathos, the infinite aspiration which is the soul of music, but also because of their vagueness, effected by means of vaporous lights and finely shaded

tints. Indefiniteness in description, precision in emotion, are indeed the proper characteristics of the art of sounds; and the painters who conceived these peculiar works cared more for exactness of emotion than for a faithful portraiture of nature. The same happens, in the domain of poetry, with Poe's and Mallarmé's lyrics; rhythm is here moulded on the very throbbings of the heart, passion is changed into beautiful chords and cadences; the outlines of their images are indeterminate, but their rendering of emotion is intense and precise. Their perusal is, however, beset with difficulties; Mallarmé was content with allusions, with hints, with the kind of elliptical suggestiveness we find in a Japanese print; the reader is not presented, for instance, with a full, detailed description of Spring; but he feels like one, who sitting at the window on a misty morning knows that Spring is come by a cloudlet of plum-blossoms drifting past him on the cold wind.

His poems are marred by the obscurity produced by the crowding of ornaments, and, above all, by their analogies so new and far-fetched that, ruled by the natural association of ideas, we miss the connecting link between feeling and image. Several of his poems remain indeed ambiguous, unsolved riddles,—delicate tracteries of words without any significance.

It is hard, in the eclogue *The afternoon of a faun*, to discern and seize the idea sunk beneath the surface of intricate imagery; yet some pictures disengage themselves from the obscure tissue, and what is abstruse throws in brighter relief their strict realism, especially in colour; 'the glaucous gold of far greeneries';—'at the hour when the forest takes on

hues of gold and ashes'. The faun, in the fierce silence of noon, on the shore of a Sicilian marsh asleep under flowers of sparkling light, calls up, 'electing for confident the hollow reeds', playing, that is, on his pipes, the memory of a 'flight of swans', of the Naiads fleeing away at his approach.

Yet, in most cases, the veil of dazzling rays fades away at a careful perusal, and the meaning appears. The distortion and blurring of the image is caused by its excessive elaboration, the thought is hid by the fiery brilliance of the metaphors with which it is clothed. We perceive at first only an arabesque of gems; it is solely after a close examination that a change gradually overspreads the picture; the main lines stand out from the glittering background, and we descry the living idea, the visage of the poem's soul, enclosed in its lustrous setting. We must here observe that Mallarmé used this cryptic style on purpose (1); was it merely to conceal his conceptions from vulgar eyes or was it his aim to reflect the mystery of the external world in the mystery of his poetical form? Both in his poetry and in his prose he is fond of reticence, of choosing with fastidious taste the finest shades of language to express the perplexity of his mind.

In his first productions he adopted the grim, desperate pessimism of Baudelaire, and repeated with

(1) Cf. Petrarca, *Epist. Sen.* XII, 2: 'Officium (poetae) est fingere id est componere atque ornare et veritatem rerum vel mortalium vel naturalium vel quarumlibet aliarum artificiosis adumbrare coloribus, velo amoenae fictionis obnubere, quo remoto veritas elucescat, eo gratior inventu quo difficilior sit quaesitu'.

slight variations the brutal conceptions of the *Fleurs du Mal*; afterwards he endeavoured to interpret life in a new way, and, while acquiring technical mastery, found the inspiration he needed in Poe and in Whistler. The author of *Ulalume* and *Ligeia*, the painter of the *Nocturnes*, taught him the suggestive power of symbols, the refinement of an ardent spiritualism, together with a lofty elegance of expression. In Poe's symbolic art, a thing meaningless in reality — a flower, a tree, a star — becomes the means of expressing a thought, a mood, a psychological condition; just as in Whistler's portrait of his mother the black, spangled curtain in the background becomes an emblem of mystery. Yet, although his aesthetic ideal has been moulded by these combined influences, his originality remains unimpaired; a perfume, like the fragrance of unknown flowers, clings to his subtle lines; with a style abounding in tropes and complex figures of speech, with a diction extremely refined and harmonious, with a flawless versification, he could produce such a perfect achievement as *Sainte*. — 'The pale Saint is standing close to the casement; on the sill lies her viol of sandal-wood — still glistening though the gilding is falling off, — her viol on which she once would play, — accompanied by flute or mandore. — She holds open the ancient book of the *Magnificat*, — chanted long ago at vespers and compline. — The storied panes of the casement, bright as a monstrance, — are swept in his flight by an Angel soaring in the evening sky, — by an Angel whose spread wing is like a harp. — And she is touching lightly — with her dainty finger-tip — the instrumental plumage, — she, the musician of silence'.

The ecstatic moment when the soul, weary of earthly troubles, turns to the radiant efflorescence of dreams, has seldom been expressed with such a magnificence of sound and colour as in *Les Fenêtres*; 'When the evening lies bleeding among the roofs — his eyes behold, on the horizon brimful with splendour, — golden ships, beautiful as swans, asleep on a river of purple and of perfumes, — their flashing sides rocking in a nonchalance full of remembrances'. Every work of art is an altered transcript of reality; Mallarmé's power of transfiguring reality into a refulgent vision may be well exemplified by *Les Fleurs*. 'From the avalanches of gold and ancient azure, and from the eternal snow of the stars, you detached, on the first day of the world, these great chalices to deck the earth, still unstained by disasters; — and you made the lilies' sobbing whiteness, that, through the blue incense of paled horizons, rises dreamily to the weeping moon and rolls on seas of sighs lightly swept by its beams'.

There is something hopeless in his passionate quest for perfection; for him the richly-clad figure of Beauty walks hand in hand with the gloomy image of Death. The cause of this deep-seated melancholy is to be found in his agnosticism; with the impending thought of the inevitable doom, a strange hush steals over his spiritual garden, the lawns strewn with a crimson rain of rose-leaves, the golden mirage of Autumn reflected in the marble basins, steals into the hall, where a pensive visage mirrors itself in the greenish waters of an ancient looking-glass; a far-off song is faintly heard, weird as the lullaby of unseen Dryads, or the dirge of waves breaking on the shore of an enchanted

sea. He is startled by the idea of the vanity of his pursuit of pleasure as a wanderer, who looking into a lonely tarn, finds himself confronted by death-pale faces gleaming beneath the sombre emerald of the waters. In the dewy stillness of his nocturnal orchard he is caressed by the fragrance of invisible flowers; yet he does not admit their existence; in a sunrise sky where scarlet clouds curl into glistening foam, he does not descry the inmost creative Spirit of Light. Among his disciples it was reserved for Paul Claudel the privilege of breaking the evil spell and of asserting the bliss of a firm belief. We must not look in Mallarmé's poetry for the naïve rapture of Spring, but for the sadness of the dying year, of all beautiful and perishable things, — not for the diamond of Joy, but for the precious stone that glimmers on the tiara of Dreams, the mysterious opal.

Paul Verlaine.

Beside the glaring colours and hard outlines of the 'Parnassiens', the poetical world of Verlaine appears wrapt in misty lights and transparent shadows. For Leconte de Lisle and Hérédia the aesthetic charm lay in the exterior glow of beautiful things, for Verlaine in their inmost significance. Therefore he gave, with Mallarmé, a powerful impulse to bring about the transition from the 'Parnasse' to Symbolism. The result of the Parnassian technique is the nearest approach to painting; Verlaine's, to music; the work of the former school is a pageant of vivid dreams, that of the latter a set of melodies. He is rather a musician than a poet; he gives us arabesques instead of clear profiles, the emotion produced by the subject rather than its shape or hue. Nevertheless the influence of the 'Parnasse' lingers in his hearly poems; the pictorial style is manifest for instance in *Caesar Borgia, a full-length portrait*; the duke Caesar stands out from the dusky background of a rich vestibule, at the end of which glimmer the white marble busts of Horace and Tibullus; 'his black eyes, black hair and black velvet dress contrast with the sumptuous evening gold,

with the dull, noble pallor of his face, furrowed with deep shades, according to the manner of Spanish and Venetian painters. And his forehead, full of formidable projects, broods under the cap, on which a feather quivers, springing out of a brooch of fiery rubies'.

In the book where this poem is found, *Poèmes Saturniens*, his inspiration may be traced back to Hugo, Lamartine and Vigny; but the technique of these singers has here undergone a strange refinement; the images seem to rise through a mellower atmosphere; they appear vaguely, as things seen through floating mist or half-lost in the mystery of distance; they melt into each other like clouds; we only catch glimpses of them, as they steal away on rapid wings. He foresaw that the distinct melody of these poets and the excessive and artificial splendour of *Poèmes Barbares* and *Les Trophées* were apt to cloy, to dazzle and tire, and preferred a scenery of subdued tints and softened outlines. His landscapes, bathed in a shimmering light, undergo a gradual transformation; perfumes turn into colours and sounds; feeling and sensation are so intimately fused that we cannot disentangle their elements; yet the freshness of the original, genuine perception breathes from his verse. In *The Shepherd's hour* he thus evokes the moment when the crimson harvest moon rises on the darkening meadows spangled with fireflies; 'The moon hangs red and low over the hazy horizon; the meadows, covered with a dancing mist, fall asleep; there is a croaking of frogs in the green rushes, through which wanders a shiver. The water-flowers close their chalices, the zenith fills with dim gleams; white, the Evening

Star emerges; and it is Night'. As he gazes on the leaves blown by the autumn wind, an image of his life comes to his mind: 'The prolonged sobbing of the violins of autumn pierces my heart with a monotonous languor;... and I go drifting on the evil wind that carries me hither and thither, as a dead leaf'.

There is a subtle toning of hues in his pictures, in which a chord of colours is developed into harmonies through almost imperceptible gradations. His poetical realm appears sometimes as a symbolical, shifting, intangible world; in *Crépuscule du soir mystique*, 'the Remembrance, blending with the Twilight, burns with a quivering red light on the glowing horizon of flaming Hope'; yet his images preserve their vitality, being in close union with life. As in the paintings of Eugène Carrière, the lines of the figures are blurred, but their emotional power is intense; he says, in *Mon rêve familier*: 'Her name? I remember that it is sweet and sonorous, as the names of people whom I loved, now exiled from Life. Her look is like the look of statues, and in her remote, calm and grave voice she has the inflexions of voices now hushed in death, and once so dear to me'.

In *Poèmes Saturniens* we are struck by the predominance of the pictorial element, in *Romances sans paroles* of the musical; these lyrics charm us by mere beauty of sound. He preferred, above all metrical forms, the 'song', conscious of the effects of which it is capable, of the resources that lie within its narrow compass. He treats the poetic material with a rigid economy, so that no insignificant details are admitted, and there is not a syllable but adds a suggestive note to the melody, a fine and unforeseen modulation to

the cadence. With their vague rhythm and hovering accents, these poems seem to be set to the fitful music of winds and waters. These subtle variations in a minor key acquire a high expressiveness, as if a magic were hid in the words; as we listen to the subtly modulated chant we seem to perceive the sounds and hues of a twilight land. 'O frail and fresh murmur! it is like the soft voice of wind-stirred grass, or the rolling of pebbles under swirling water'. Life comes but vaguely, with fugitive emotions, into these reveries; 'I descry in a murmur the subtle outlines of ancient voices, and in the musical gleams the future sunrise of a pale dawning love'. It is a series of dreamy landscapes, exquisite, if somewhat wan and evanescent, the fruit of visionary hours; they lead us to a region of freshness and calm, where, in the deepening gloaming, rain-wet flowers nod in the glens and floating mist scents like frankincense the path. There is a new note, a dying loveliness, in these 'lieder', indefinite like old half-remembered airs, melodies whispered, not sung. Here words, without ceasing to be poetry, grow to the intensity of music.

His lines appear spontaneous and free; the poet seems to say: 'The song is a self-revelation; only let the soul sing by itself'. Yet he works with a stern artistic conscience, shrinking from no labour, with a scrupulous and deliberate selection in subject and phrase, discriminating subtly in the analysis of his sensations and emotions. These 'romances' are variations on the same feverish, tired mood; we seem to overhear them, as mere echoes of the inner song.

'The piano, kissed by a frail hand, gleams vaguely in the rose and grey evening, while, with a light rustle

of wings, a very old, feeble and charming air roams discreetly, almost scared, in the boudoir perfumed by her. — What do you wish from me, sweet, playful song? What have you wished from me, fine, uncertain refrain going soon to die towards the window ajar on the little garden?’

But a keen poignancy is obtained by sharpening vague sorrows and griefs; and in the landscapes, by a temperance of expression, by omitting certain outlines and tints, by fusing the personal element with the external. Therefore, in spite of their apparent artificiality we realise that these little water-colours were done after nature. He obtains rare effects through careful limitations; he seems vague and reticent because his form is always fluttering on the edge of the inexpressible; he chooses only the ‘curiosities’ of landscape and feeling; yet with essential art he sums up in these short lyrics a way of looking at life.

In *Fêtes galantes* he evoked the parks of Lenôtre, their tall hedges of clipped box-trees, their rustling draperies of ivy, their avenues peopled with the languid figures of Watteau. Fountains are sobbing in the moonlight, statues dreaming in the violet distance, while among honey-tinted roses and mauve azaleas he leads his frivolous ‘bergeries’, his ladies dressed as shepherdesses, his masquerades, Harlequin, Pierrot, Colombine, foolish and tragic, with a smile of strange despair. Here too, where the personages of the ‘commedia dell’arte’ rise to be the actors of a passionate inward drama, we have a kind of symbolism; an attitude of the soul is translated into the scene of a pantomime. And keen is our interest in the trifling

drama that is being played by the maskers, because it is an image of our interior tragedy. We descry secret tears in the oblique eyes behind the mask, and a weary, bitter smile on their farded lips, the tragic smile of Watteau's *L'Indifférent*. As in Schumann's *Carnival*, the artist is weaving beautiful patterns of sound not only to convey the charm of his psychological state, the grace of a refined weariness, but to breathe his very soul into the quaint, many-coloured shapes. And he is mainly concerned with 'nuances' of feeling; we have not Love, but the Shadow of Love and its mystery. They are dancing, singing, playing, in bright fanciful disguises; but 'although they sing a victorious love and their luck in everything they do, they do not seem to believe in their happiness; — and their songs mingle with the moonlight — with the calm, sad, beautiful moonlight, that sets the birds dreaming in the trees and makes the fountain-jets — the tall, slender fountain-jets among the statues — sob with ecstasy'. They follow Colombine in her queer dance; 'o prophetic stars, tell me: toward what sombre or cruel disaster is the implacable child leading her flock of dupes?' They are whiling away the hours in idle talk; but the phrases uttered by the ladies fall sometimes strangely on the heart of the frivolous listeners. 'The evening was falling, an equivocal autumn evening; then they said in a very low tone words so strange that since then our soul trembles struck with amazement'. There is a kind of indefinable anguish in their vain love; — 'drive away for ever all purpose from your heart asleep; let us be persuaded to a supreme indifference by the lulling sweet breath of the breeze that wrinkles into russet

waves the dying grass at your feet; and when, solemn, the evening falls from the black oaks, the nightingale will sing, voice of our despair'. And, at last, only the ruins of love are strewn on their path. — 'In the old, lonely and bleak park two Shadows are recalling the past. — 'Do you remember our ancient ecstasy?' 'Why should I?' — 'Does your heart always throb at the mere mention of my name? Do you always see my soul in your dreams?' 'No'. — 'How blue was the sky, how great our hope!' 'Hope has fled away, vanquished, toward a black sky'. — Thus they walked in the weeds of the path forlorn, and only the night heard their words'.

With *Sagesse* begins a new phase in his poetry; he emerges from the sensual, poisonous dreams that enthralled his soul; a new emotion, a mysterious joy, has followed in the train of sorrow; the horizon is no more an inscrutable, unanswering gloom; the first sunbeam of Hope glides on the water, tracing a golden path for heavenly apparitions. Henceforth his images, quickened by an intense inner life, assume a supernatural radiance; his songs have the rapture that springs from the deepest sources of religious meditation. His work takes on a new grace, the charm of an almond-tree, in full bloom, mystically white, near some dark lonely pool, all its blossoms quivering like tiny silver wings in the breeze. The stain of guilt is washed away, a blissful calm enfolds the mind; yet the remembrance of sins remains, a sincere remorse, mingling a dim sadness with his exultation; the chilliness of the bleak Night lingers in his soul drunk with the splendour of the Dawn. He lifts his mind to eternal hopes and his prayer rises to an ecstatic chant. It is not the

limpid hymn of Faber, the introspective poetry of Newman; he never rises to the ardours of Crashaw; but his lyrics are full of a secret beauty, of deep tenderness and love; they glow with a subdued fire, as when through a thin veil of mist a lily reveals its core of burning gold. In his wanderings through the Land of Evil, the night had closed above his soul, he seemed to stifle under the weight of sultry darkness; at last a serene tract of sky appeared, bright with stars, above the sombre plain; and, as he surveys the ruins wrought by sin in his heart, and, sick of vain desires, yearns to infinite peace, he sings the victory over temptations, the purification, the springing up of the soul, soaring on immortal wings.

There is also in *Sagesse* a striking change in his technique; he speaks of his novel ideals in lyrics unwearied in fervour, perfect in execution; the feeling is intensified by the simplicity and purity of the form. He shows his technical skill in the treatment of difficult metres; in his invocation to the Holy Virgin the short-lined strophes, in their smooth, free 'élan', are like the slender columns and spires of a Gothic cathedral. Although polished with utmost care, his lines retain no trace of the labour. He draws from simple expressions a grace unknown to more robust, but more superficial writers; in his sonnets, which remain matchless in their harmonious freedom, we find colloquialisms mixed up with exquisite phrases.

'God said to me: 'My son, you must love me. You see my pierced side, my radiant heart bleeding, and my bruised feet that Magdalen laves with her tears, and my arms aching under the weight of your sins, and my hands! — Have I not loved you even

unto death, o my brother in my Father, o my son in the Holy Ghost? — Have I not suffered as it was written? — Have I not sobbed your agony supreme, o poor friend who are seeking me where I am?’

‘You must love me; my love is the fire consuming for ever the flesh and evaporating it like a perfume. My love is the deluge destroying in its waves all wicked germs, so that one day the Cross may be raised up, and, by an incomparable miracle of mercy, I may possess you, trembling and daunted. It was my purpose, since all eternity, that you, poor soul forlorn, should love me, who alone remain to you!’

‘I answered: ‘Lord, you have truly described my soul. I love you; but look how low am I, and your love mounts up like a flame! — Look at my sad struggles! I would that at least your shadow covered my shame, but you have no shadow, you, uprising Love, calm fountain (1), bitter only to those who love their damnation, you, perfect light except to eyes sealed by a deadly kiss’. In another sonnet the images embody in their living splendour the beauty of mystic passion. ‘But, even on earth, you will enjoy my gifts: peace in your heart, love of poverty, and my mystic evenings, when the soul unfolds to a serene hope, and seems to taste, according to my promise, of the eternal Chalice; the moon glides on the religious calm of the sky, when the angelus-bell rings, rose and black; then the spirit waits to be raised into my Light, into the endless awakening in my perennial Charity, the unceasing music of my praise, — to be

(1) ‘Quoniam apud te est fons vitae: et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen’ [*Psalms*, XXXV, 10].

in Myself, in the lovely radiance of your sorrows, — of your sorrows, at last mine, and that I loved !’

At the beginning of the book he relates his conversion. — ‘A good knight riding in silence, — Misfortune pierced my old heart with his spear. All the blood of my heart spirted out in a scarlet jet, then it evaporated on the flowers, in the sunlight. A shadow covered my sight, a cry rose to my lips, and my heart died with a wild shiver. Then the knight Misfortune came near me, alighted from his horse and touched me with his hand; with his fingers in the iron gauntlet he probed my wound, while he proclaimed his Law with a hard voice. And lo ! at the icy touch a new heart was born in me, a heart pure and bold ; and now a young heart, fervid with a divine simplicity, throbs in my breast. And the wise knight, having mounted again his horse, beckoned to me while he was going away and cried — I still hear that voice — ‘At least be prudent ! Because this is good only for once’.

La bonne chanson is a pure, joyous interlude between the sombre melancholy of *Poèmes Saturniens* and the refined weariness of *Fêtes galantes*. There is something virginal in it, the rosy effulgence of an April morning. As in *Amour*, *Liturgies intimes* and *Bonheur*, there is here an effective concentration in his seemingly slipshod style, in which the homely and the rare are curiously mingled, and to which a certain preciousness lends an additional charm. On the contrary in *Jadis et naguère* we become aware of a failing of his powers ; not only are some of these lyrics very low in aesthetic merit, but we find in them a tendency to sickly, feverish dreams begotten in the

bitter quest of pleasure, of the 'bourreau sans merci'; the music of the lines is no longer perfect, and we turn disgusted from these cynical, repulsive compositions, the offspring of a diseased intellect haunted by turbid hallucinations. The same may be said of *Parallèlement*.

His lines possessed a life-giving power and they left a lingering echo in subsequent poetry. He showed a new delicacy in the handling of the sumptuous, heavy materials used by the 'Parnassiens', and the same technique appears in many a contemporary writer. It is in Francis Jammes that we find faithfully reflected the characteristics of Verlaine, his inward struggle and his sense of loving abandonment and repose in God. At a certain period of his life the hyacinth of sensuality yielded to the mystic passion-flower; and he rose to the same conception of the human existence. 'A humble life of easy and wearisome labours is a state of election that requires a great love', had said the poet of *Bonheur*, and this thought is re-echoed in *Clairières dans le ciel* and in *Géorgiques chrétiennes*. Verlaine initiated him to that process of transfiguration through which the landscape becomes alive with eternal beings; in the freshness and silence of the dewfall the murmurings of trees turn into voices, a far chime of bells, stealing softly upon the dreamer, becomes a heavenly song; Angels appear, their pensive head surrounded by a circlet of silver light.

Arthur Rimbaud.

The aesthetic theory of Arthur Rimbaud is a kind of idealism. His poetic world appears to us as the product of a fervid, and often morbid, imagination. Far from copying outward things, he selects as subjects his visions. His work is the offspring of a fantasy, whose aim is to deform real objects, thus fashioning shapes widely different from the material entities. His scenery is only a modification of reality; yet the combination of forms and colours is so very quaint, the variation of hue and alteration of line go so far that at last the metaphors seem to develop independently of the objects which gave them birth. He constantly transforms sounds and perfumes into colours and music, dreams into solid objects, material bodies into ethereal beings.

This method of composition leads to strange results; his pictures appear underived from nature, as the sensations that gave them rise remain undetected, each figure being associated but by a remote analogy with its source. The images, breaking out into new aspects, build other figures, until the visible world is covered over with a veil of shifting hallucinations.

Therefore his 'poèmes en prose' look at first as if composed of disconnected metaphors, set beside each other against all laws of coordination and association of ideas. The queer combination of images seems to transcend the limits of logic. Then — at least in his best works — just as in a kaleidoscope the bits of coloured glass arrange themselves into definite patterns, the clouds of words are pierced by brilliant rays of thought and the meaningless sequence of phrases acquires a signification.

The reader must be initiated to this method; then he becomes aware of the sincerity of the poet, and recognises that his form is no mere play of words or mannerism, but a kind of expression faithfully rendering his psychological state. His style is in perfect accord with his condition of mind, the phrase keeping pace with his quick, sudden changes of mood. As it is always the case with genuine inspiration, with the spontaneity of an art springing irresistibly from the soul, every trope, every epithet appears inevitable. — 'Their language', says Shelley, of the true poets, 'is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension; — these relations are said by Bacon to be 'the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various objects of the world' (1). On the other hand, this method leads to absurd caprices, to hideous, brutal pictures, the product of a perverse, diseased mind, of the mental disorder following the excess. Besides, several of these poems are mere sketches or formless experiments. The poet seems to be writing

(1) *A defense of poetry*, ch. 3.

merely for himself; his creations appear unsubstantial, their contours uncertain, blurred as by the quivering heat exhaled by a marsh or burning sand.

Le Bateau ivre, with its magnificence of diction, its keen sense-perceptions and intense feeling, remains his finest work. Here he is master of a style that preserves its delicacy without losing its vigour. The boat is an emblem of his heart, driven by blind passions, yielding to all impulses. This symbol was suggested by the trite allegory of the storm-tossed ship, but his genius enabled him to endow it with a striking originality. His artistic faculties appear fully developed when he is barely seventeen, revealing a genius that has cleared at a bound the preliminary stage. He finds at once the adequate form; he is able, at the outset of his poetical career, to do his utmost in the handling of metre. There is no faltering or stumbling in the headlong rush of his lines; he strikes the chords of rhymes, uses the colours of his palette, with a sure hand. We admire the technical beauty of his work, as he, aiming at exceptional effects, creates vivid impressions with swift, broad strokes, avoiding explanatory details, dwelling only upon the essential, his object being to concentrate the attention upon the characteristic features of the image. *Le Bateau ivre* is a brilliant series of seascapes, each of them answering to a special mood; here, sacrificing reality to a higher poetical truth, the artist shows us his inward world of beauty, a world known only to the fantasy, born of an ecstatic contemplation of coruscating visions.

‘As I was gliding down impassive rivers, I did not feel myself dragged by the men, who had me in

tow; certain boisterous Redskins had taken them as targets, having nailed them to variegated stakes. — I cared not for crews; when, with the death of these men, all the racket came to an end, the rivers let me drift wherever I pleased. — The storm has blessed my awaking on the sea; lighter than a cork, for ten nights I danced on the billows, with no regret for the silly eyes of the lamps. Sweeter than to children the pulp of sour apples, the green water soaked through my firwood hull. — And thenceforth I have bathed in the poem of the milky, star-infused ocean, darting through the greenish azure, where a drowned man, pensive, livid, entranced, sometimes descends. — I know the skies bursting into lightnings, the waterspouts, the surf, the currents; I know the evening, and the dawn soaring high as a flight of numberless white doves, — and I have sometimes viewed what man has only fancied to have descried. — I have spied the sun low on the horizon, spotted with mystic horrors, illuming long, violet coagulations; for whole months I have followed the surges, charging the reefs like hysterical herds; — I have dashed against incredible Floridas where panthers' eyes glared through the flowers; I have seen marshes in fermentation, vast nets in which the bulk of a leviathan lies rotting amid the rushes; I have beheld glaciers, silver suns, waves of mother-of-pearl, skies of glowing embers, and dusky bays where gigantic serpents, gnawed by bugs, drop from twisted trees exhaling black perfumes. — I have been hailed by ineffable breezes; at times the sea, whose sobbing eased my violent roll, raised towards me, a martyr weary of poles and zones, its shadowy blossoms crowned with yellow suckers. —

And now I, a boat that has been lost under the weedy hair of lonely creeks, thrown by the hurricane up into the ether where no bird can live, — I, whose swamped carcass no gunboat, no Hansa sailer would pick up, — free, reeking as I came out of purple mists, — I, who pierced the flushing sky, the sky like a wall covered with lichens of sunlight and dribblings of blue, — I, who ran, speckled with tiny electric moons, a crazy plank escorted by black hippocamps, — I regret the ancient parapets of Europe. — I have gazed at sidereal archipelagoes, islands, delirious skies that expand before the rower; but, indeed, I have wept too much. Dawns are harrowing, moonlight is always appalling, and sunlight bitter. — If I feel a longing for Europe, it is for a dark, cold pool, on which, in the balmy nightfall, a child, crouching, full of sadness, sets afloat a boat as frail as a May butterfly. — O surging seas, I cannot any more cross the wake of cotton-laden argosies, or dance in the pride of standards and flames, or swim under the horrid eyes of pontoons!

Claudel expresses in rich and forcible language the eagerness of Rimbaud's soul in the search for new, exotic impressions (1). 'Who would have entered those places where the evil angels are chained, — who would have spelt the golden text, of which you may decipher two or three lines, for a second, in the evening sky?'

Turning our attention to the structure of the verse, we are impressed by the vehemence of rhythm and

(1) *La Messe là-bas*, "Nouvelle Revue Française", 1919, p. 43.

phrasing with which the poet, smitten by the shock of sudden and violent sensations, tries to render his inward turmoil. We must go to Baudelaire in order to find such a vigorous sense of metre. Some features of Baudelaire's *La Mort* are recognisable in this poem ;

Ils s'enivrent
D'espace et de lumière et de cieux embrasés;
Montrez-nous les écrins de vos riches mémoires,
Ces bijoux merveilleux, faits d'astres et d'éthers.

La gloire du soleil sur la mer violette,
La gloire des cités dans le soleil couchant,
Allumaient dans nos cœurs une ardeur inquiète
De plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant.

His work stands distinctly apart from all other manifestations of Symbolism, as the image is to him not only a reflection but an 'equivalent' of the emotion. He does not convey an idea or a sensation by means of suggestion or periphrasis, as it is the case with Mallarmé or Saint-Pol-Roux; the metaphor is to him 'interchangeable' with the impression, his prime object being the identification of dream with reality. 'Poetical eloquence', says Newman (1), 'consists, first, in the power of illustration; which the poet uses, not as the orator, voluntarily, for the sake of clearness or ornament, but almost by constraint, as the sole outlet and expression of intense inward feeling'.

The *Illuminations* — he uses the word in the sense of coloured-prints — fall into two groups: projections

(1) *Poetry, with reference to Aristotle's Poetics*, ch. 7.

of emotions by means of symbols, and merely fanciful pictures. The 'poem in prose', being unhampered by rhyme, rhythm and metrical laws, afforded to him ample liberty of conception and execution. Free from all restrictions, he boldly takes his own way; he plays not only with fancy, but with sight; all kinds of images, angels and men, giants and dragons, flowers and glaciers, flock about him, streaming out of his mind in continuous flow. With a strong tendency to exaggerate, he delights in startling shocks of colours and sounds. He is incapable to check the dangerous bent of his poetical faculties; the ill-governed activity of fantasy runs riot. As in the moral field, he is a rebel to all rules. He mingles trivialities and rare images, simple idioms and highly elaborate phrases. Viewed in their exteriorities his poems appear confused, bewildering, like an Impressionistic picture close to the eyes of the observer. Besides, we notice in his use of line and tint, a barbaric strength, just as the broad outlines and the flat, glaring colours of Gauguin's pictures recall a primitive art. But let us pierce through the many-coloured veil to the inner world out of which they sprang, and they will rise clear and distinct before our mind. The sentences are not logically arranged, and yet the required impression emerges from the turmoil of clashing metaphors. The following piece, *Flowers*, is characteristic of his method, with its qualities and shortcomings.

'From a gold step — amid silk ropes, grey gauzes, green velvets and crystal discs turning as black as bronze in the sun — I see the foxglove blow over a carpet of silver filigree... — I descry pieces of yellow gold scattered on agate, mahogany pillars upholding

an emerald dome ; and bouquets of white satin and thin ruby rods surround the water-rose. — Like a god with huge blue eyes and snowy limbs, the sea and the sky attract to the marble terraces the crowd of young and strong roses' (1).

Here he combines various images, subordinating reality to the fancies stirred up by it in his mind ; he aims at giving, through this embroidery of metaphors, an impression of life, freshness and bright colour.

The last piece in *Autres Illuminations*, with its mystic atmosphere, its crude realism and its effects of light in a sombre interior, recalls in some way an etching of Rembrandt. 'The pool seemed a sinister wash-house. One day the afternoon sun was spreading a large scythe of light on the buried waters, like a white angel lying on his side in this cistern ; and all the reflections, infinitely pale, quivered. — All sins, thin and strong threads spun by the devil, wished to throw themselves into the water. And the divine Master came. The light in the vaulted pond was yellow like the last leaves of the vine. The Saviour stood against a column'.

The following passages (2), in which the fantastic and the homely are strangely blended, bear with them the atmosphere of the bewitched land where the poet lives ; they introduce us abruptly into the sphere of experience of a morbidly sensitive nature ; they are reverberations, at once vague and intense, of the emotional conditions under which they were produced ; in both the dominant note is a poignant weariness.

(1) *Œuvres*, 'Mercure de France', 1898, p. 124.

(2) *Childhood*, V, p. 131. — *Fairy*, p. 202.

‘Grant me at last a sepulchre, far down underground. — At an immense distance above my subterranean hall, houses have their foundations, mists gather; the mud is red or black. Monstrous city, endless night! — On my side, nothing but the thickness of the globe; perhaps, gulfs of azure, wells of fire. — In the hours of bitterness I imagine balls of sapphire, spheres of metal. I am lord of the silence. Why should the suspicion of an air-hole wanly loom in a corner of the vault?’

‘For Helen were evoked the luxuriant ornamental trees of shadowy virgin forests and the impassive radiances of the astral silences. The ardent heat of summer was confided to silent birds, and its indolence to a boat made of priceless griefs drifting through coves of dead loves and faint perfumes. — For the childhood of Helen throbbed the heart of the poor, shivered the thickets and the shadows, shimmered the legends of heaven. — And her eyes and her dancing movements are finer still than the glow of precious things, the cool breezes, the delight of beautiful scenery and exquisite hours’.

They are built up of details seemingly irrelevant and incoherent, which, at a closer scrutiny, appear indispensable, each of them contributing to the required effect. The poet works the crowd of images sprung from his luxuriant fantasy into an organic whole, thus securing a single ‘tone’ in his composition.

He is continually confronting and solving problems of expression; he relies on the power of suggestion contained in language — is not the term ‘glamour’ derived from ‘grammar’? — in order to describe sensations hard to fix in word-painting, hallucinations,

the emotions of a man awaking from a trance. 'I settled the form and motion of each consonant, and I flattered myself that it was possible to me to find a poetical language accessible to all the senses' (1). — 'I accustomed myself to the simple hallucination; I saw very distinctly, and truly, a mosque in the place of a factory, a hall in the depths of a lake, monsters, mysteries; — a vaudeville placard raised terrors before my eyes'. — 'I have tried to invent new flowers, new stars'.

Emphasis is laid upon fictitious creatures; we have a mirage instead of substantial reality, the poet choosing without hesitation illusions rather than truth. The work of fancy is carried to an excess and the boldness of metaphors knows no limit; all kinds of queer shapes are wrought into the woof. 'Is it a mock-show or serious art? is the poet in earnest or merely jesting?' asks the bewildered reader. He is like a painter who, copying a landscape, would continually shift his point of view. Much is left to the reader, whose mind is required to supply the missing links, to fill up the gaps between images and ideas. We are not only shocked by this want of connection, but also by false, strident notes, by wrong proportion and perspective, and bad taste. To think that, in some at least of his early poems, his object is to startle the reader, is not wholly to misconceive his aim. Several of these pieces are spoilt by trivial thoughts and indecent phrases.

Aloysius Bertrand laid the foundation of this form of poetry in his *Gaspard de la Nuit*; taking the hint

(1) *Œuvres*, pp. 293, 241, 258.

from this book Baudelaire brought it to a complete development. Unlike Bertrand's pieces, where everything is sharply defined, Baudelaire's poems in prose rely on suggestion for their effect. Then Mallarmé, refining upon Baudelaire's style, gave it a subtler charm. J. K. Huysmans — besides trying his hand at it in *Le Drageoir aux épices* — extolled this form of expression, which, condensing thought, feeling and imagery in a small compass, can produce the impressions of a long poem or even of a tale. Rimbaud went farther on; with their rich workmanship, their originality and intensity of emotion, some of the *Illuminations* can easily bear comparison with the best compositions of Baudelaire and Mallarmé.

While imagination plays the main part in *Illuminations*, psychological analysis is the leading power in *Une Saison en Enfer*. In the tension of his soul, all his intellectual faculties are astir, concentrated in an effort to bring before us a synthesis of his whole life. An intense emotion smoulders under the sarcastic utterance; a nostalgic aspiration is present everywhere in this book; hence the vitality of it as a work of art.

A Season in Hell is a personal confession where he has laid aside — as it is his wont in all his utterances — all restraint in relating the bitter experiences of his soul. As in the presence of Eternity, he shows us his most intimate view of himself, his perplexities, anomalies, frailties, his sudden changes of mood; but he reveals at the same time a rare energy in struggling against inward foes, a sincere horror of sin, a yearning to wisdom and truth. 'I perceive that my spirit lies asleep. If it always were full awake from this moment,

we might soon attain Truth, that perhaps surrounds us with its weeping Angels. If it had been awake to this moment, I should not have yielded to destructive instincts. — O purity, purity! It is this minute of awaking that has given me the vision of Purity; through the spirit one goes to God' (1). He is eager to cleanse his heart of the infection of vice; hence a clear tendency to conversion (2). 'O hags, poverty, hatred! It is to you that my treasure was given in trust! I succeeded to destroy in my soul all human hopes. I have stretched myself in the mud. I have bounded, silently, as a wild beast, on all joys, to strangle them. — But I can be saved. Doubtless, debauch is beastly; all rottenness must be thrown far away. — I shall bless life; I shall love my brothers. God is my strength and I praise God'. These thoughts were born of sorrow in a mind whose wrong ideals failed utterly when put to the ordeal of action, a mind therefore embittered with disillusion. But he was not unconscious of pangs of conscience, of the pursuit of the 'hound of Heaven'. 'O happiness! in the most lurid towns, its tooth, sweet even to death, warned me at cockcrow, 'ad matutinum'. — I felt obliged to travel, to break the charms crowded in my brain. On the sea, that I loved as though it might have laved away all my foulness, I saw rise the Cross that consoles'. And the vision of salvation came often to his mind. 'Divine Love alone grants the keys of science. I perceive that nature is only a spectacle of goodness. The song of

(1) *Œuvres*, p. 251.

(2) *Ib.*, pp. 215, 223, 224.

Angels rises from the ship that comes to save; it is the song of divine love' (1).

The underlying idea of these pages is not unlike Baudelaire's conception in *The Flowers of Evil*; he finds in Christianity the basis for the ideal vision of life; he recognises sin and guilt; his leading thought is a piercing outcry out of the abyss of corruption, the cry of Baudelaire: 'Out of the depths of the dark gulf where my soul has fallen down, I invoke your mercy, o You, the only One I love'. It is a meditation on the conflict of Good and Evil, on the drama of a disorderly, dissolute life, like Wilde's *De Profundis*. It shows us a weak temper, easily yielding to temptation, to influences of environment, to sophisms that lure afar from intellectual health; with a feeling of surprise we listen to these words uttered by a man, who, in his rambling talk, seems at times insane. His thoughts are often coloured by an extreme dejection (2). 'You shall remain a hyena', cries the demon who had crowned me with such lovely poppies. 'Get death through all your desires, your egotism and all the capital sins'. Such phrases are frequent in 'these few hideous leaflets of the pocket-book of a damned man'. He was yearning after the Absolute, the Eternal; 'Raise your eyes', says Claudel to him (3), 'and look at the Host in the monstrance; what you are seeking so far away — Eternity, accessible to all the senses, in this life — is there'.

(1) *Œuvres*, pp. 247, 224.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 216.

(3) *La Messe là-bas*, 38.

A counterpart to this poetry is to be found in art in some paintings of James Ensor, but, above all, in the drawings of Henry De Groux, Charles Doudelet, Charles Schwabe and Heinrich Vogeler. We find an analogous conception of style in Corbière's *Yellow Loves*, Cross's *Sandalwood Casket*, *Les Chants de Maldoror* of Lautréamont, *Les Palais Nomades* of G. Kahn. He shows spiritual and formal affinities with Laforgue, and, in suggestive power, with Nerval's sonnets; with Nerval, he is the forerunner of many a recent singer; his influence can be easily recognised in contemporary poetry, as his manner of expression is, on the whole, congenial to the high-strung and eager mind of to-day's writers; we meet, for instance, with clear reflections of his style in such an important poet as Claudel.

The medium through which these wild images are conveyed is a straightforward diction; he does not recur to the winding syntax, the curious inversions and intricacies of Mallarmé, but adopts the simplicity of Baudelaire. The difference between Mallarmé and Rimbaud lies in the fact that, while to the former suggestion is the essential of art, the latter's main object is the definiteness of the image. One tries to enlarge, expand, 'estomper' the image, rousing far echoes in the soul, weaving a spell easier to feel than to elucidate; the other, on the contrary, circumscribes the figure sharply, frames each picture in well-defined limits. In Mallarmé the light of the mental 'phantasm' is broken up into prismatic reflections, in Rimbaud it has a fixed, hallucinating glare. This kind of poetry is comparatively rare in other literatures; we think of Blake, and yet the aim of Rimbaud is not to see 'the spiritual form' of things, but to modify their

shapes; the closest parallel to his art is perhaps to be found in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. In certain jottings of Coleridge we may also find a foreshadowing of the subtleties of the French poet; in the note entitled *The night is at hand*, in *Anima Poetae*, for example. 'The sweet prattle of the chimes — counsellors pleading in the court of Love; then the clock, the solemn sentence of the mighty Judge — long pause between each pregnant, inappellable word, too deeply weighed to be reversed in the High-Justice-Court of Time and Fate. — A more richly solemn sound than this eleven o'clock at Antwerp I never heard — dead enough to be opaque as central gold, yet clear enough to be the mountain air'.

Claudel has justly defined the spiritual attitude of Rimbaud, absolute in his choice of evil or good; 'he was like the merchant who has been told of a unique pearl, and who, to get it, leaves at once his house and sells all he has'; and again, where he makes the poet say: 'Until I have not found Paradise, the true place for me is that which most resembles Hell'.

Creation was his intent, not the more or less exact portraiture of things; he was well aware that in the creative power lies the source of the highest poetry, for the chief aim of art is to build up an imaginary world out of reality.

Paul Claudel.

Paul Claudel is the direct descendant of the leaders of French symbolism; but instead of mirroring passively their ethical and aesthetic ideals, he refines upon their technique, and prolongs their thoughts into daring and unforeseen developments. Mallarmé's poetry had been like the ecstatic radiance of a sunset over an autumnal garden, a sumptuous and melancholy mirage, a dream of splendour and mystery and lurking despair. The Verlainian twilight diffused a tender iridescence on the red-gold trees and the crimson-flecked chalices; yet the glades were haunted by evil shapes, alluring voices mingled their whispers with the sound of vesper bells; only when the first stars began to glisten, the sultry atmosphere was pervaded by a mystic calm. Then, with Maeterlinck, a sinister night spread its shadows, through which tragic figures were glimmering: Alladine dying in a grotto of blue roses, Maleine strangled by the false Queen with her ruby-necklace, Melisande weeping near the lonely fountain; the pale Intruder was approaching silently in the strange park, while the peacocks flew among the cypresses and the swans floated dead, like perished dreams, on the

black stillness of the lake. The poetry of Claudel recalls the time just before sunrise, when great white stars are still throbbing in the west, but a skylark is already trilling on high — a fiery speck above the dark earth — struck by the first ray of the sun hidden under the world's rim ; there is a confused elation, a divine freshness; the heart is brimful with tumultuous hopes, and we seem to hear the pulses of creation beat with a fervid rhythm in the exultation of the universal awakening.

His dramas derive in some way from the allegoric work of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam : *Morgane*, *Elen*, *Axel*, and there is a reminiscence of the tale *Duke of Portland* in the scene between Violaine and Pierre de Craon, in *L'annonce faite à Marie* ; but in Claudel there is a more limpid vision of life, bringing a widening of outlook, an enlargement of sympathy and a greater depth of thought. His technique in the treatment of the 'vers libre' owes something to Walt Whitman; yet there is in his verses, hardly bound together by sweet and quaint cadences, a new, wild melody, which we should look for in vain in contemporary poetry; the rhythm keeps time with the rush of the inspiration, while the images, a seething tide, well out of his exhaustless fantasy. But it is in his lofty spiritualism, that the essential merit of his work is to be found; his plays are enacted in the world of mind rather than of matter, and his personages move within his soul's sphere.

The fulfilment of the promise contained in his early productions came with *L'annonce faite à Marie*, which was wrought out of a symbolic drama, *La jeune fille Violaine*, published in 1901, in the volume *L'Arbre*.

The profile of the protagonist, Violaine, is drawn with exquisite tenderness; thirsting for sacrifice, she never swerves from her path, never shrinks from new and harder trials, unafraid of scorn and pain, unafraid of death, since death is to her only a barrier to everlasting bliss; listening to the call of the Infinite, she treads with sure foot the most arduous crags, constantly toiling upwards, in pilgrimage sublime. Her unconscious grandeur, her spiritual ardour is evoked in a magnificent passage. 'And already', says Pierre de Craon, 'as the fiery hue of the pomegranate-blossom shimmers on all sides under the bud unable to contain it any more, the effulgence of the Angel, to whom death is unknown, took possession of our little sister' (1). She confidently expects the coming agony, unmoved, untroubled, like a fallen star glistening with heavenly rays among the shadows of the earth, waiting to reascend to its celestial mansion; there was a foreboding of early death in her delicate loveliness.

'Yet, as I was leaving', says her father, 'I could see in her eyes, among the flowers of the Spring, rise a flower unknown'.

Pierre de Craon: 'The vocation of death, like a solemn lily'.

Disowned by Jacques, discrowned of her bridal diadem, calm among obscure torments, with unflinching fortitude she clasps the Hand which is to guide her; and the imperishable flame of divine Love lights her lonely way. A willing holocaust, she bends her adoring

(1) *L'annonce faite à Marie*, Paris, 'Nouvelle Revue Française', 1914, p. 196.

brow before the Will supreme; 'powerful is pain, when it is as voluntary as sin!' And with what an exquisite pathos the poet evokes the figure of the dead girl! 'Her body is still soft and pliant; while the nun, who was dressing her, was holding the body in a sitting posture with her hands around the waist, oh, how her head drooped backwards, like the head of the partridge that the hunter has gathered, still warm, in his hand!' When the miracle of restoring to life the child of her sister, Mara, is accomplished, we forget the woes of the blind leper girl, and she arises surrounded by an unearthly glow; and her father sees in her the saint enthroned; 'may your father, o Violaine, see you high above himself, through all eternity, at the place that has been reserved for you, as far as the smoky fire of my hearth is from the morning star, when this fair virgin lays its illumined head on the breast of the Sun!'

Claudél's originality of conception appears in the manner in which Pierre de Craon tries to realize his dream of a gorgeous cathedral erected to the memory of Violaine; he is looking for the atmosphere of the nave, rather than for its shape, dimension or architectural effects; the church will be filled with a golden light, as a remembrance of the ring that the girl has given him; the radiance of her soul will pervade the lofty aisles. 'I take with me your ring; I am going to make of this circlet a golden seed! — I shall enclose the morning gold among the walls of my church. — The common light is subject to change, but the light that I shall filter under those vaulted ceilings does not vary. — The architect, by means of arrangements known only to him, builds the edifice

of stone like a filter in the waters of God's light, and gives its lustre to the whole structure as to a pearl'. And he sets himself to the arduous task. 'Our master', says the apprentice, 'is designing the stained-glass windows; that's why he sends us here to fetch sand. — It is more difficult to make light than to make gold, to blow on this heavy matter and to render it transparent, 'as our bodies of clay shall be transmuted into bodies of glory', according to Saint Paul. — That's why he pours down into large pure vases, filled with glowing water, hyacinth, ultramarine, gold, vermilion, and beholds those beautiful inmost roses, looks how the coloured water turns when struck by the sun and the grace of God, and how it changes and blooms in the matress'.

The mystic love of Pierre de Craon and the thoughtful serenity of Violaine's father, Anne Vercors, are contrasted with the base cunning and the cruelty of Mara; indeed, the plot appears overstrained, not so much on account of the rash act of compassion of Violaine to Pierre de Craon, as for the incredible wickedness of Mara; insatiate of evil, as Violaine of sacrifice, she kills Violaine, thus repaying with monstrous ingratitude her benefits; in her envy and jealousy she is illogic, absurd. We perceive that this blackness has been introduced into the picture to set off the splendour of the heroine; but the artifice is too evident; the contrast, however, does not lack beauty. A great peace, as of a serene moonlit night, and the supreme joy of self-sacrifice, are in Violaine's heart; but Mara is struggling in the shadowy river of her malice, and, after the crime, a terrible gloom descends on her mind. 'I am no more the same as

once! There is something of an end in myself. Don't be afraid. All is the same to me. There is something broken in myself, and I remain helpless, like a widowed, childless woman'. The light in the eyes of Violaine is quenched; but it is Mara that is really blind; because a pure soul, unflawed by any earthly desires, sees clearly through the events, piercing the veil of matter to truth, unweaving the web of appearances; but evil sits in darkness. Claudel's mysticism is deep and sincere; he is conscious that God is urging us with infinite love on the steep ascent of moral perfection, and this consciousness spreads throughout his vision of life, till all creatures are penetrated by the divine immanence and the whole universe becomes aglow with spiritual light. Sorrow's task is to cleanse and purify; only through pain shall man conquer evil; and there is a stern joy in suffering for the right cause. 'The cup of sorrow is deep', says Violaine, 'and who sets his lips to it once, does not take them away when he wishes to!' He desecrates in life's misery and distress a pledge of immortality and future bliss, and gleams of sublime beauty in the agonies of the human soul. Life must be like a taper giving back its essence of light, while its substance is burning out in secret pain; existence is to him a gift, the best use of which is to return it to God, as an offering on behalf of others. 'What's the value of the world compared with life's?' says Anne Vercors; 'and how may the value of life be known, if not by giving it away?'

Claudel is master of a forcible and impressive style; the harmony of his passionate utterance is like the music of a waterfall, blending melodies and rich

chords in its thunder; the images are variously presented, as the reflections of surrounding objects in the rushing sheet of water, sometimes limpidly mirrored in a glassy curve, sometimes broken by the whirls of spray and haloed with a changing lustre. His metaphors are sometimes like clouds too dazzling to have their shapes immediately perceived, their outlines being blurred by excessive brightness; they throng thickly, following one another in breathless rapidity, expressed in a form which relies mainly upon force and yet is subtly chiselled; the effort to express his meaning with the utmost precision, to render sensations in their original purity, shows itself in his curiously elaborated phrase. Take, for instance, this strangely penetrating notation; 'The voice of the bird, that we descry on the topmost branch at the same time of the morning star, is so sweet that we do not know either if the bird is singing, or if we only see the eternal star glittering against its heart'.

When *Tête d'Or* was published in 1891, it was perceived that a new star had risen on the horizon of poetry, a strange star, sparkling with wild flashes of colour, like Antares in the September haze; it ascended from the vapoury line and it shone at last with a limpid glitter in the blue; yet even in this early work the imaginative energy is displayed in the originality and grandeur of the conception. The protagonist, Simon Agnel, is a tragic symbol of the ruler and the conqueror; the rutilant hair, golden as a blown flame, as a wave at sunrise, crowns his brow, marking him as a born master of men; his sceptred hand shall sway the multitudes; he shall be at first

a threatening, at last a saving force; yet his imperial soul never rejoices in domination; he labours under the weight of his task sublime as under a fatal necessity, and there is gladness in his dying hour, as when the sun, having done its radiant course, sinks in purple glory. 'He had come', says the Messenger, 'our king, a prince of unique beauty, adorned with wonderful deeds! — And we, full of secret sorrow, remembered his face shy and terrible'. An inexpressible sadness, a universal mourning, follow his death in battle; 'we have let him go', says the Captain, 'and he has gone as gold sinking under water!' (1).

In this drama, dictated by an inspiration borne on impetuous wings, full of the stormy roar of armies, of clangour of trumpets, of cries of distress, the poet reveals a mind free and open to all visitations of thought, a mind that has meditated with strange intensity on the destiny of man, a fantasy that has looked on the fiery fountains of suns; the material world is transfigured by the ardour of his soul; nevertheless, we wish for a closer unity of action, and the tendency to a strict symbolism sets a limitation to his powers in character-drawing. The Princess is by turn the emblem of Poetry, of Love, of Beauty; adorned with a jewelled stole, with a quaint tiara, she is an allegory of the immortal song, gushing forever from the heart of man. 'The Muse sometimes strays in our earthly paths, — and, her hair bristling with laurels, she walks along the waters, singing verses, alone, like a wild hind'. Then, ragged, forlorn, cru-

(1) *Tête d'Or* in *L'Arbre*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1901, p. 148.

cified by an outlaw, she symbolises loveliness supreme in death. 'O Grace with transpierced hands, — sweet as the last sun!' Likewise, the other personages appear by turn real creatures and changeful abstractions. The splendour of the style shows an intellect that has been fed on the loftiest poetry, on Aeschylus (witness his translation of the *Agamemnon*), Dante, Shakespeare, above all on the Bible; there is an evident reminiscence of *Macbeth* in these words of Tête d'Or: 'Farewell! Men, adieu! — Farewell, gestures, a noise of footsteps through dead leaves, pitiful speeches uttered over and over with the patient violence of a madman, confusion of figures and words; all this for one moment'. The rapidity with which his thoughts crystallize into images, the exuberance with which he develops his conceptions, almost crush the idea under the wealth of accumulated details, of metaphors and clustered similes; yet we are always far from an empty magniloquence, and there is often a biblical grandeur in his utterance panting with excitement, only half-articulated, as if speech were sinking under the stress of emotion. Let us quote by way of illustration the description of the first victory of Tête d'Or; 'And then, I say that a panic arose behind them, as if all of a sudden, although it was day, Night, lifting up her gigantic head with its diadem of stars, had blown the trumpet of dizziness! — Others were astonished and trembled, and the hostile ranks, like horses struck with horror by the clang of chains, threw themselves backwards'. As with the first appearance of the hero on the battle field, so with the last; the Eastern armies are routed, and a powerful and bizarre image conveys the

disorder of their defeat. 'Thrice we charged against that rabble, and at last, giving way under our despair, they scattered like a herd. And as the Indian, worried, turns back in his race to glance at the elephant he has wounded, maddened with pain, pursuing him, like a mountain, across the dazzling rice-fields, — they saw us behind themselves'.

While in *Tête d'Or* the subject and scenery are wholly mythic and fantastic, and do not belong to any particular place or age, in *L'annonce* there is a certain local colour and a faint historic background, and in *L'Échange* he portrays the life of the great American towns, contrasting it with the beauty of nature unspoiled by man. Louis Laine and Thomas Pollock are the representatives of these two aspects of the New World. *L'Échange* is the tragedy of a man impatient of civilization, stifling among the huddled gigantic sky-scrapers, wildly following his instinctive impulses; his happiness is to lie in the forest, breathing the perfumes of the summer night, or to roam by the shore, looking at the green glancing wings of the waves, at the glittering surge; but he is enticed by the wiles of the *ville tentaculaire*, and ruined by dissipation and vice.

Here the poet gives utterance to his enthusiasm for natural beauty, and reproduces with extraordinary vividness the colours of sea and cloud, the evanescent charm of the seasons. 'Oh, may I behold the end of the year, and the leaf coloured as a cheek, — the season when the day, even since dawn, is soft and mellow as evening, and the sky always pure, — when the maples and the sumacs kindle, and the first look as dressed in a gold raiment that hardly clings to

Nature is to him a crowd of spirits, clad in splendour, adoring God's mysterious aim, conforming to His will; and all things are harmonized into one grand chord of beauty. He clearly formulates this thought in a characteristic passage of *La Ville*. 'If this leaf turns yellow, it is neither because the earth has taken such a position on its heavenly path, ... nor that, dropping down, it may give shelter and nourishment to the grains and the insects at the foot of the tree. — It turns yellow to supply holily the neighbouring leaf, which is red, with the note needed for the full chord. — What's the use of the orchis in the heart of the virgin forest, of the sapphire that no miner will ever dig out of its veinstone? — The Being, who created and preserves us, knows the reason why, and we contribute secretly to His glory'. *La Ville* is the tragedy of the effort to build up society without religious foundations; the town is wrecked, the founder, Besme, killed by the mob; but on its ruins a new government arises, based on justice and freedom. The conception is not so distinct as in the other dramas; his dream of the ideal city remains undefined, and the significance of the whole play only looms in the distance; he prefers to give hints rather than to explain, and some characters, in spite of their verbiage, do not tell their secret, wear impenetrable masks to the last. The influence of Ibsen is felt throughout. Yet he sounds with keen insight the depths of human nature and finds new emotions, venturing into unexplored regions of the soul; he shows how man's life is in close union with the cosmic plan, how the external and the internal world are intimately interpenetrated; he withdraws the material veil, discovering

the all-pervading spirit, the spirit silently quickening the sod, reviving the spark hidden in the root, the force that rushes the stars along their courses.

Le Repos du septième jour is a fruit of his residence in the Far East; the action of the play takes place in China; the people being harassed by the spirits of the dead, the Emperor descends to the underworld to learn the motive of the persecution, and returns to proclaim the law of rest on a day of the week. In this work his absolute disregard of conventional forms leads him to indulge in caprices of phrase as well as in extravagances in the construction of the plot.

His acquaintance with exotic scenery and manners is far better represented by a book of wonderful sketches, *Connaissance de l'Est*, where he shows a habit of keen, alert observation, and that peculiar, quaint grace in evoking the landscape which we meet with in the woodcuts of Hokusai and Hiroshigé. With a strict realism, and yet with an intense poetical feeling he conveys the exotic atmosphere, local colour and outlandish features of landscapes — mostly Chinese — through that bold directness of expression to which Rimbaud had pointed out the way. The versatility of his mind is also proved by his fine essay on the *Development of the church*, a contribution to those aesthetic studies of architecture among which *La Cathédrale* of Joris Karl Huysmans stands foremost.

His lyric faculty attains its highest level in the *Cantate à trois voix* (1), where three women, Fausta, Laeta, Beata, are singing, while they watch the dawn

(1) In *Deux Poèmes d'Été* (the second, *Protée*, is a mediocre farce). Paris, 'Nouvelle Revue Française', 1914.

break over the slumber of the hills and the ripening harvest-fields, in a district of France in the valley of the Rhone. The poet weaves the three voices into a single melody, welding them into a continuous song by means of the interlacing of rhymes and the unity of rhythm and tone. One of the singers is on the threshold of life, waiting for her betrothed, the second, an exile, is full of a nostalgic yearning, the third, a widow, looks out from her darkened home to Eternity; and in the rapture of a moonlit night between spring and summer, they express in alternate verses their exultation, their melancholy, their hopes sublime. Blending with flowing ease its various cadences, the manifold song carries us away on the stream of its melody to mystic places, where the wind is laden with the fragrance of eternal gardens, where the soul stands with quivering wings on a lofty summit, her entranced eyes full of visions. The poet's thoughts are lifted by a fervid imagination and clothed with rich and various ornamentation, each idea being, so to say, counterpointed with unexpected metaphors, which gleam and glide away during its development. The beauty of nature produces in him a kind of intoxication; the images grow fast and numberless, he gathers them in large sheaves, and so abundant is the crop that we have to choose from them in order to build up again the scenery or the emotion by which they were suggested. See how the artist conveys the ecstasy of dawn, mingling in a sumptuous chord reality and fancy; 'The sky once again becomes pale before us. — What is this light, O sisters? — This new day? — This mystery working in the deep? — This occult torch, lighting up the things from

behind? — The night, without ceasing to be night, little by little, like water, has become diaphanous'. And the passing of youth is described with a glowing pageantry of figures, as in a painting of Byam Shaw; 'Where is Spring? Where are the hues of childhood? — Where is that blue so pure, that almost incandescent green? — Where the freshness of the wild rose? Where, on your face, that red ardour of Pentecost, the fiery tint of the purple, like evening in a pine-wood and the sunbeam in the month of May?' The metaphors and similes are hammered in the heat of inspiration, so that they retain the dazzling brilliance of their birth in the poet's mind, a passionate or emotional rather than intellectual radiance.

The influence of Shelley is perceptible in the colouring and that of Mallarmé in the audacity of diction, in the twisted syntax of the phrase, in the choice of rare epithets; thus, for instance, in the image of the rose; 'And the rose vaguely blooms, only for one evening; — and lo! from each stem the complex butterfly, just now imprisoned by its own wings, has flown away!' And there is the striking evidence, the originality and the inevitableness of the style of Browning in some of his similitudes; 'And soon, he himself, who is young and strong — this trophy of a single moment — is going to dissolve, — death merging into immortal life, — and the white flowers of spring on all parts disappear into the foliage, as into a sea sucking back its foam'. But in Claudel, with this novelty of form, there is a deep undercurrent of thought, which imparts an earnest, stern and mystic grandeur to a style which would be only a curious play of words, to a poetic land, which, without this

bracing wind from the eternal ocean, would cloy the soul with its heavy perfumes. Says Anne Vercors, in the *Annonce*, 'I live on the threshold of death, and an inexplicable joy is in myself. — And now I enter the night and it does not frighten me; I know that there also all is clear and well ordered; I enter the season of that great celestial winter that sets all things in motion, the sky of the night — where the eternal Farmer urges on the Seven Oxen, his eye fixed to a changeless star, as we set our eyes on the green branch that marks the end of the furrow'. Thus is the realm of Heaven figured by the mind of the simple labourer, who does not forget his effort in driving straight the plough, while he is thinking of the Infinite; thus the homely blends with the sublime in a poetry based on everlasting truth.

In the dramas contained in *L'Arbre*, Claudel was feeling his way; — with *L'Annonce* an elevation in the conception of life raised his art to a greater height and led inevitably to a new interpretation of existence and to set a different value on the things of the world. Therefore in his translation of Coventry Patmore we perceive that the subtle charm of this poetry has been fully apprehended by a kindred spirit; his mastery of form enables him to keep unaltered, as far as it is possible in a foreign language, the grace and vigour of the original. The main source of his inspiration is a mystic vision of the universe, as it is conceived in the beautiful phrase of St Augustine that he has prefixed to his *Art poétique*: 'universi saeculi pulchritudo... velut magnum carmen ineffabilis modulatoris'. The poet is creating again and preserving for ever all things in his work. 'I cannot name a thing

but it becomes eternal; the leaf turns yellow and the fruit drops to the ground, but the leaf and the ripe fruit and the rose in my verse do not perish; they vanish from earth, but their names in my mind do not perish for ever. They evade time; with my voice I make all things eternal'.

His inspiration flows in his *Odes* (1) like a stream, carrying sand and gems, hardly repressed by the severity of the argument; sometimes, in his utmost freedom, he falls into grossness. His utterance is close to thought; it is a voice with many accents, cadences, answering to the cries, agonies, ecstasies of the soul. Sometimes it rings too loud, clamorous, as if straining to reflect the ideas breaking into flashes, into dazzling bursts of splendour. It is a most individual form, endowed with particular qualities, moulded upon the waves of emotion, yet ruled by a vivid sense of rhythm and music. He is audacious in the use of images, sometimes, perhaps, overbold; but the apparent disarray of words and thoughts is harmonised into a whole, and each of his odes has a kind of intellectual symmetry, attains a unity reflecting the unity of his inner world. So great is the number of images that he draws from the well-stored treasure-house of his memory that these odes seem to lack concentration; for the same reason the main idea appears only through a gradual revelation. Things start into life, humanised in the mystic atmosphere; 'the mountain source gives to drink to the Ocean with its little cockle-shell'. — An intellectual energy

(1) *Cinq grandes Odes*. Paris, 'Nouvelle Revue Française', 1913.

is at the root of his verse, a thinking power, very rare now-a-days when all poetry is founded on sensation. His poetry is the expansion of an inward richness, made audible in verbal music and visible to the mind by means of imagery, the vesture of his world of thought.

Side by side with this reasoning power — which he observes in Dante, ‘ascending to Heaven, going down into Hell, as one, who, steadying a foot on the logical ground, advances the other in a sure stride’ — there is in his work the spontaneity, the mysterious, irresistible, almost unconscious impulse of inspiration. ‘Thus I work, without knowing what I do; thus the mind, with a deadly spasm, ejects the words out of itself, like to a source that does not know anything but its pressure and the weight of the air’ (1). We feel the elation of the poet’s soul, in spite of the selfishness and baseness of an atheistic world, — exultant in his continual effort, with an unwearied hand, — inebriated with joy in his task, which is to make legible the divine handwriting, bearing testimony to the preestablished harmony and purpose of the universe. Thus ‘the monk, who enters again his ruined convent, is happy, because he has all that he wants, his book and a superior above him; and, having crossed himself, he sits down, and to copy it well, opens before him the Gospel at the first page and begins again the gold initial on the purple scroll’.

The *Five great Odes* were conceived in a meditation illuminated by the Grace, and composed by a mind responsive to heavenly visitations, to mystic promptings.

(1) *Ib.*, pp. 67, 16, 116.

They are the fruit of an impassioned contemplation of life. The poet is not content with the exterior beauty of temporal things, but is looking for their hidden source, for the divine forces by which they are ruled, for the unchanging realities and the indestructible life beyond the whirling cloud of the world. At night he is looking at 'the immense, active sky'; 'You have given us the nocturnal heaven; and the observer seeks and finds, as in a watch, the pivots and the rubies, — Hercules and Halcyone, the constellations like to the clasp on the pontiff's shoulder and to the great ornaments set with stones of various colours, and here and there, at the boundaries of the world, where the work of Creation ends, the nebulae, as, when the sea has been violently tossed, the calm returns and on all sides arise large sheets of turbid salt' (1). But he is not satisfied with this contemplation of the exterior world, and he penetrates, beyond the universe, beyond the Creation, working with wondrous order and alacrity and yet a vortex of things doomed to die, to the Creator, to the centre of miraculous fire; and the firmament becomes an image of eternal delight, the perennial heaven of saved souls, burning inextinguishably in the conflagration of the eternal Love. The Catholic Church is the temple the lamps of which Satan's wrath shall never put out, nor shall he undermine the adamantine vaults. Through it the souls are saved; it is like a miraculous fishing; 'innumerable stars are caught in the meshes of the net'. The soul lives its true life beyond death; 'as one descries little spiders or certain larvae

(1) *Ib.*, 'Magnificat', p. 87.

of insects hidden in purses, like precious stones well concealed in their small bags of cotton-wool or satin, I have been shown a brood of suns still entangled in the chilly folds of a nebula, and it is so that I discern you, my brothers, in the mud and under disguise like stars in pain'. Death, instead of darkening us, sets the soul free as a planet beginning to run its eternal race in its orbit. The poet beholds all the dead as countless stars in an immense sky. And Heaven is yearning for more. And we must listen to the pitiful cry of the dead and help them; 'after the star of Bethlehem, our darkness is craving for stars'. The Angel of God, once a year, takes from the altar a pyx brimful with our good works, mortifications, rosaries, masses offered for the repose of souls, and goes to Purgatory; a little star is shining brightly between his fingers; and the dead come and receive the suffrages and are relieved. 'Not otherwise, on a sombre Christmas morning, have I seen the crowd of Chinese women, row after row, press to Holy Communion, their heads covered with long black veils'.

Les Muses was inspired, he tells us, by a carving on a sarcophagus found on the Ostia road. The nine Muses he here regards as the faculties of the poetical soul, and his purpose is to show how they are indissolubly joined to each other. In their midst is Terpsichore, the goddess of the dance, the essential principle of rhythm; Mnemosyne (who is here introduced instead of Calliope), the eldest, is the emblem of memory, and she never speaks, but listens, ponders, feels; she is the inmost source of all art. Next to her is Clio, the recorder of facts; Melpomene, the weaver of tragic plots, gives the movement of

action to the ode ; Thalia, with her laughing mask, symbolises the joy of song, while Polymnia seeks for the right expression, 'how to say' a thing; Erato is the gift of inspiration, the initial love of creation, the necessary beginning of all aesthetic work. Urania, absorbed in the laws of the Universe, suggests and governs the development of thought; the idea comes to the poet's mind 'like a sudden planet arising, yellow or rose, above the spiritual horizon', and she rules the growth of the system of ideas 'climbing, like the Pleiades in their ascension, through the sky in march'. Euterpe, the musical conception of the world, holds a lyre; 'do not drop from my hand', the poet exclaims, 'o seven-stringed lyre, that I may see all the universe through the well-stretched strings, both the earth with its fires and heaven with its stars !'

In *L'Esprit et l'Eau* he compares the sea, as a symbol of freedom and the infinite, with the superior liberty and penetration of the soul. It is through the spirit that we are united to God in this world; and from the contemplation of the transitory Creation the poet rises to a vision of eternity. 'If the dew coruscates in the sunlight, how much more the human ruby and the essential soul in the intellectual ray!' 'When Hesperus appears, it is not only our eyes that acclaim the inextinguishable star, but it is our heart that greets it with exultation; and, o my God, if you have set this rose in the sky and endowed with such a great glory this globule of gold in the beam of the created light, how much more You will glorify immortal Man vivified by an everlasting soul !'

In the third ode, *Magnificat*, he recalls the benefits that he has received from the Lord, and raises to

Him a song of thankfulness because He has delivered his soul from the worship of Idols, from death, from its evil inclinations. 'O how heavy is my heart with the praise of You and how difficult for it to rise to You; it is like the heavy censer of gold, crammed with incense and living coals, which flying for an instant to the end of its stretched chain, soon redescends, leaving in its place in the sunbeam a great cloud of thick smoke!' Everything is solemn, magnificent and useful in the world; looking at the untiring activity of the universe he asks for his place among God's servants; he expresses his submission to the divine will, his dilection for the task reserved to the poet, which is to find God in all things and to render them assimilable to love.

The fourth ode is a dialogue between the poet and the Muse, — not, however, the goddess of art, but 'the Muse whose true name is the Grace', that is, the saving Grace. He tries to thrust her back, wishing to be only an artist of the word, being somewhat intoxicated by the beauty of the material he works with; 'if the vintager does not enter with impunity the winepress, do you think that I may crush my great vintage of words without the vapours mounting to my brain?' His only desire is to perfect his tools and to fully enjoy the gift of song; he would like to write a serene, well-ordered poem, indicted by the inspiration going at an even pace, instead of 'running with his hand on the back of the winged horse that drags him along in its broken race which is half a flight and half a leap'. — But she answers him that his first duty is to sanctify his soul; he ought to listen to the appeal of the eternal Love, to catch the

precious hour in which she, the immortal Angel, is at his side ; because she is of Heaven and fleeting on earth are her radiant feet. ' For I am not here for ever, but I am unsteady on this ground as a man at the bottom of the water that pushes him upwards, as a bird that tries to alight on a bough, its wings half-folded, as a flame quivering on the wick. — Look, look, for this short moment, at your well-beloved, at her visage that destroys death '. ' Rejoice in your triumph, for he who has no attachment to anything is the master of all ; — laugh, o immortal, to see yourself among perishable things ; they seem to be there, and pass away, but you are with God for ever '. Yet sometimes he feels himself dragged to earth by the burden of his body of flesh ; ' I hear the nocturnal bride who comes again to me, without a word, comes again with her heart like to the bread of sorrow or a vase full of tears, comes again from Hades, from the other side of this low canal which is not even lighted by the ray of a leaden star or by the dismal horn of Hecate '.

La Maison fermée is the symbol of a life turned inwardly, the ideal life of the artist. The poet is reproached by the crowd for the obscurity of his verse and for his carelessness of the interests of mankind. ' You have become like nature ', they say, ' and are as devoid of attention for us as the hills ; we ask you to give completion with your mind to the things of the earth, none of which is complete ; besides, your language is not like ours, we do not recognise the words that we have brought you '. The poet answers that his first duty is to fulfil the mission with which he has been entrusted by the Lord, the

office of re-uniting all things in Him ; therefore his mind must needs be turned inwardly toward God. His only passion is now to know God, to see how every thing is contained in all the others, and to prove it by creating every object again in his mind (1). In order to contain all things his soul has to be circumscribed within definite limits — a closed House — like the Universe which is inexhaustible and yet enclosed in well-defined boundaries. All the space is filled up with the laws of a divine geometry, built up with splendid calculations, like the computations in the Apocalypse; ‘ You have set each milliary star in its place, like the gold lamps around your sepulchre in Jerusalem ; and I descry all your stars watchful like the Ten Wise Virgins to whom oil never fails ’. He has once sung the interior Muses, the nine indivisible Sisters ; now he will extol the great exterior Ones, the four Cardinal Virtues, the Keepers of the spiritual House. In the first, Prudence, reigns above all the sense of duty, the rapture of a swift and straight course toward the aim of self-perfection, ‘ as in a motor-driver, who, going full speed, in the night, holds his eyes riveted for hours and hours on the little white lamp in the bottom of the valley, his goal ; and neither the snow masks his hard-set face nor the frost sews up his inflexible eyelids ’. Fortitude grasps the lightning with her right hand, while with the left she strangles the serpent ; and the brunt of demons breaks against her large breast ; all evil winds, all the Powers of the Air, blow on her face, but have

(1) Cf. his *Art poétique*, pp. 125-7.

no force against the invincible rock. Temperance is the ruler of life, keeping the right tension in the vital strength; she is the infallible conscience, the supreme discrimination of the artist who selects and casts away images and thoughts, inexorably, acting beyond explanation; and her secret art preserves through all changes what must be always the same. Justice considers the end of all things and makes up our accounts for evil and for good.

The *Processional* which ends the series of the *Odes* preludes, with its austere simplicity, to the style of another book of poems, *Corona benignitatis anni Dei*. In the *Odes* the inspiration is like a river that does not carry its waters straight to the sea, but spreads on its way over the fields, fostering luxuriant crops of images; here it is running clear and swift between its banks. And, with this change of form, there is also a change of matter. In his former lyrics he contrasts the shifting realities of earthly life with the eternal; he is looking at things with the transfiguring power of love, until the world appears penetrated with a divine effluence, and we feel a divine perfume in the fragrance of flowers. Here he concentrates his attention on supernal things, beyond life. There he sings the perishable towns of men, here the city of God, the everlasting house built on rock-foundations.

In *Corona benignitatis anni Dei* he is content with the bare outline of ideas and he sets them down in clear, unadorned phrases. The lines have no more the impetuous rush of the *Magnificat*, the antistrophic movement of 'La Muse qui est la Grâce'; in couplets or triplets bound by a rhyme, they look like a chanted prayer. In the *Odes* he was still clogged by human

love, and yearned to be purified; 'deliver me from the thralldom and weight of this inert matter; clarify me, divest me of this execrable gloom!' Here there is renunciation and the quiet joy of wisdom. His style in this work may be illustrated by a passage taken from 'The Group of the Apostles', where he speaks of St Simon. 'He has taken the earth by its greatest width, where there is no fear of seeing the end of it or the sea looming up in an indentation. He has before himself the whole curve of our planet. He crosses the Tanais and it is he alone that sits before a little fire in the desert between the Ural and the Ob. He has no need of long speeches, books, interpreters; all his luggage is the name of Jesus on his lips, and a little wine and meal in his scrip, the cross in his right hand, and the stone for the Mass on his breast. He goes to all places where smoke rises from the hearths, and the fatherly instinct is deep in him'. He looks lovingly at his converts, 'glad of their docile souls, and the snub-nosed Mongolians that he has baptised gaze at him when he starts again on his way turning to them his visage smiling in the sun, with eyes full of tears'. The limpid flame of prayer burns steadily throughout the work, and here and there flashes in beautiful images. 'Which of so many suns an Angel tore away by chance, as a torch, to light the way to the three Old Men?' (1) he says of the star of Bethlehem; and of baptism 'Henceforward, as far as the last well in the desert, as far as the soon-dried puddle in the road,

(1) *Corona Benignitatis Anni Dei*. Paris, 'Nouvelle Revue Française', 1915, p. 23.

there is not a drop of water, that is not sufficient to make a Christian, that, communing with what there is in us of most vital and pure, does not inwardly fecundate for Heaven the future star'.

The creative faculty of his imagination is manifest throughout his poems and dramas and even in such a philosophic work as *Art poétique*, though in a different degree; in *L'Otage* it appears at its lowest, because the poet tried to combine his two main tendencies, the mystic and the realistic, with a too visible effort, into a tragedy half historical and half psychological. Claudel has restored to the French stage, flooded with flat and dirty stuff, 'the poetical play'. He keeps close to reality, and yet the voice of poetry is distinctly heard throughout his work. While Verhaeren cannot step out of the lyric field, Claudel passes freely from the dramatic to the lyric, and blends both styles in his technique. He possesses the dramatic gift, which consists in a knowledge of human nature not only deep but also wide and thus allows the poet to show life to us not only in its essence but in its variety too. As it is indispensable in drama, he lays particular stress on the 'ethic' element.

In *L'Otage* we have in Turelure, the villain of the play, a subtle study of malice; at once wily and brutal, he wields pitilessly his power, thus heightening the heroism of Sygne. In *Le Père humilié* his technical ability shows itself in the searching analysis of Pensée; the salient features of the two brothers, Orso and Orian, are drawn with sure strokes. In both plays, and also in *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, the interest is centred on a woman; self-sacrifice and forgiveness are

respectively the main spring in Sygne and Violaine; in *Pensée*, it is love. *The Bear and the Moon* is a quaint and poignant play; there is a keen human pathos distilled in its grotesque fancy.

The *Art Poétique* contains an exposition of his philosophical, rather than aesthetic, theories. It is divided into two parts: 'knowledge of time' and 'knowledge of the world and of oneself'. The first expounds his interpretation of the universe, that is, of the figure created round us by simultaneous things. Space is a finished design; time is the design on the making, in motion. The source of movement is 'the quivering that invades matter when in contact with a different reality, spirit (1)'. The harmonic cause that rules the gathering of beings at a determinate moment of their duration is the art of the Creator, the 'poetical art'. Movement is the permanent action of matter, and the very support of its existence. 'Weight is not the effect of attraction exercised from outside upon an inert mass; it is the same mass in which the impetus (*élan*) is enclosed, and the stone flies to the ground as the bird towards the tree'. In his method syllogism is superseded by metaphor; 'the old logic had for its organ the syllogism, the new one has the metaphor, the operation resulting from the joined and contemporary existence of two different things; the metaphor is not only used in our books, it is the native art employed by everything that exists'; because every thing does not only exist in itself, but in infinite relation to all other things.

(1) *Art poétique*. Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1915, p. 38.

Therefore, he says in the second part, the first degree of knowledge, in inanimate beings, consists in the statement of relations among things; it is by their limits that things know each other. Nothing ends in itself; every thing is built up by its inside as well as by the outside void which would be traced by its absent form; and each individual trait is determined by the others. So that all things are disposed as in the harmony of a perfect picture; 'the rose, with its crimson hue, enjoins to the sun to paint other flowers white or blue'.

It is in the fusion of the mystic and the passionate that his poetry shines of its purest splendour, as when he evokes, with a new glamour, the last moments of the man who has preferred God's love to earthly joys; 'the time will soon come when another door dissolves, when he, who has met but slight recognition in this life, having done his task, falls asleep in the arms of his Angel, of the eternal Bird; — and already the dusky Paradise appears on every side through the diaphanous walls, and the censers of the Night mingle with the smell of the corrupted wick, the flame of which is flickering and going out'. His poetry leads us along a way barred now and then by creepers and brambles, darkened by overhanging foliage, steep with hard ascent; yet the carolling of birds floods the air with music, the thickets are diapered with beautiful, strange blossoms, and the path, crossed by dazzling shafts of light, ascends towards the Sun that crowns the everlasting hills.

Georges Rodenbach.

The background of the delicate and melancholy landscapes evoked in his poems is, without exception, the pale Venice of the North — Bruges-la-Morte. To him each of the ancient houses revealed a marked individuality in the profile of its gable, in the shape of its diamond-paned casements, in the brown and ruddy shades of its finely weathered walls; each house seemed to mirror its tall and narrow façade in the motionless water, and to dream, ecstatic in the eternal contemplation of its own image. And another world trembled and gleamed under their long rows in the dormant waters of the canals, — the unsubstantial world of reflections — a dreamland where uncertain figures were quivering among glimpses of luminous clouds, of blue sky, of copper-coloured foliage.

The poet experienced an intense grief as he lingered in the lonely squares, bathed in the rosy light of sunset, streaked with the mauve shadows of plane-trees; the strangely human melancholy of the old

town remained struck into his soul forever; its frail, forlorn appearance came to have for him a sad glamour, from which he never yearned to be free. The desolate city assumed for him the pathos of a human visage, the beauty of a fairy princess, pale in death, adorned with antique jewels of red gold and aquamarines. A mood of resigned, inexplicable sadness settled deeply in the poet's heart; it was as if he tried to model his soul on the mystic loveliness of the enchanted town.

His ideal world is 'The Realm of Silence'; not, however, of the weird silence of haunted lands, as conceived by Poe in his visions of wonder and terror, but of the dreamy silence brooding over ancient, magnificent palaces and autumnal gardens; it is an unearthly stillness made more intense by the drowsy chimes of church-bells, by rare footfalls, by the monotonous trickling of broken fountains. It is also 'The Realm of Remembrance', the misty region where the things of the past appear distorted into eerie forms, where the sorrows of life, so far from growing less poignant through the clouded distance, are increased to a wild, heart-rending pain by new elements supplied by fantasy.

Sad was his conception of life; he instinctively recoiled from the cruel struggles of the world, and took refuge in the solitude of his poetic universe; life passed by him — a pageant of wan figures drifting on the wind — without stirring the surface of his soul; his sensibility was extremely keen, but only to abstract feelings, to refined impressions. Only the pale amber of the winter sun, the perfume wafted by blossoming lilac-bushes, the singing of 'béguines' from the cloister,

entered his 'House of Vision', as fugitive glimmers and echoes of the outer world.

Fernand Khnopff has painted in his *Recluse* a fit emblem of Rodenbach's soul; in her grey eyes there are a strange ecstasy and a bitter sorrow, a proud disdain and a nostalgic yearning; she has sought a refuge in the unbroken stillness of a land far from the world; but she is now a prisoner of dreams.

Rodenbach loved the calm of forgotten rooms; in his secluded apartments he felt himself surrounded by the fantastic beings which lead a secret life in familiar objects; simple, homely things impressed him with a sense of mysterious sufferings; the diaphanous cups, the slim glasses vibrating to some distant echo, the curtains seeming to retain in their snowy folds the pallor of moonlight, the lamps opening their golden eyes in the twilight appeared to him endowed with a kind of spiritual beauty. Our attention is made to converge upon common, apparently insignificant things; from them the poet shapes symbols of love, passion and death, and every emblem changes its significance through some slight alteration either in its colour and shape or in its surroundings.

The literary activity of Georges Rodenbach may be divided into three periods; in the juvenile poems [*Les Tristesses*, 1879; *La Jeunesse blanche*, 1886] the influence of Lamartine and Alfred de Vigny is still clearly visible; he first showed his original power in *Le Règne du Silence* [1891], which was followed in 1896 by *Les Vies encloses*; here his passion for the beautiful town shines in its full splendour.

'O town, my sister, — to which I am alike! — We two are the city in mourning, now asleep, — and with

no ships in its sad harbour, — none of the vessels that once mirrored in its water their golden sides ; — and yet, what does it matter ? The sky is better seen, in its full beauty, on empty waters. — And is it not the essential glory to reflect, — as in a looking-glass, — the eternal things, to angelize with azure their iridescent impassible appearance ? — It is because we are so docile to its will that the remote heaven paints you and my soul with the same hues, — that its sweet gardens are imprinted in our hearts, — o you, my soul, and you, Dead Town, my sister ! ' (1).

The leading influences were now Verlaine and Mallarmé ; especially the exquisite nonchalance of the former had a strong appeal for him ; in fact, in spite of all the painstaking care with which he chiselled his images, combined the sounds and disposed his lines in skilful arrangement, a simple, straightforward diction attracted him far more than the artificial charm of a complex style. The subdued melodies of his verse seem to reëcho the song of vesper bells, the whisper of winds and water ; they are the dirge of dying flowers.

' My soul, during all this long, dreary afternoon, — has suffered the approaching death of a bunch of flowers ; — they were far from me in a neighbouring room, — where my fear had brought them, already benumbed. — O withering blossoms ! and I believed they would last one day more, steeped in the pity of the water ' (2).

(1) *Le Règne du Silence*, Paris, Fasquelle, 1901, pp. 105-7.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 9.

His poetry is connected with the art of his country; we feel in his mysticism the grace of Memlinc and Rogier van der Weyden; and there is a similar comprehension of nature and life in the works of contemporary artists — in the paintings of Baertsoen and Buysse, in the drawings of Auguste Donnay, in the sculptures of Georges Minne.

Rodenbach never fell under the influence of the 'Parnassiens'; he preferred the atmosphere of the 'Symbolistes', where only now and then rare 'nuances' shimmer through the opalescent haze. He loved the evanescent smile of a faded pastel better than a glaring composition of Rubens, just as he liked to sing the pale flame of a lamp rather than a gorgeous sunset.

'The lamp has just been lit, — smile of light, mystery of fire, nativity in the glass! — It is like a sulphur-yellow and blue star, — a golden butterfly; — the room is surprised of this sudden happiness, saved from the poverty of being dark, like one who has received alms'.

'The lamp in the room is a white rose, — opening of a sudden in the grey garden of evening; — the lamp in the room is a white moon, — and at its rays water-lilies seem to blow in the mirrors' (1).

We are aware that the images scattered throughout each poem without any apparent link are bound together by subtle affinities — that they belong to the same psychological chord — that they are but the myriad facets of a single gem. He chooses a theme

(1) *Le Miroir du Ciel natal*, Paris, Fasquelle, 1898, p. 18.

and works it out through various tones, in the returning cadences of the verse, each time showing it in a modified shape, under a new light. His themes are often sensations that it is hard to put into words; and the thought is left suspended, as if the conclusive chord had to be supplied by the reader.

A salient feature of this period is the frequent use of allegory, so that his aesthetic theory can be summed up in the formula: poetry is the expression of feeling by means of symbols and verbal melody. In this way every thing becomes the emblem of a spiritual attitude, and therefore an inexhaustible source of inspiration. His lines in *The Voyage in the Eyes* show us a characteristic example of it (1). 'Windows of the infinite, — living mirrors in which the universe creates itself anew! — Some eyes are frozen lands, where one wanders in the pathless unknown; — some keep the glow of an ancient sunset that was the moment of essential love and shed its leaves in them as a great rose; — and others are blue of having so long gazed at the sky. — And some eyes are older than the faces in which they are set; — the eyes are in October, the lips in April; — the latter are full of roses, the former of dead leaves. — Or are they sometimes windows of an orphanage, where we descry between the snowy curtains a flame, the echo of a hearth in the depth of the house of the soul, round which come and go and sit down the Passions? — What clarities — reflections of stars or of lamps — prolong in the eyes luminous flights of stairs?'

(1) *Les Vies encloses*, Paris, Fasquelle, 1896, p. 181.

The third period of his art is represented by *Le Miroir du Ciel Natal* [1898], which is all aglow with the radiance of a fervent mysticism. — 'Lord, I remember that on a serious day I have pledged myself to write a work in your praise; therefore it is for You that the lamps are here burning, proclaiming your glory, — it is in thankfulness for your gifts that I have led my swans in pilgrimage to You; the fountain-jets soaring as doves are a symbol of my faith; and I have sought your Face in the Hosts, the viaticum of love'. The fine poem *Les Cierges* may be quoted as a characteristic instance of the last flowers of Rodenbach's poetical garden.

'The tapers burn slowly in the aisles; — they seem to be in pain; do they perhaps really suffer? — They appear to die in spasms of light, as hollyhocks shedding their leaves; — their shivering flames seem to say farewell as lips. — O burning, pale tapers! they make expiation on the church-chandeliers for the sins of men with their pious fires; — and to be martyrs is their pride' (1).

Some mystic poets have endowed their symbolic world with such an intellectual light that a spiritual ray seems to enrich their images with a golden glow, even when they are taken from objects otherwise indifferent or vulgar; in the work of Georges Rodenbach several passages afford striking examples of this poetic transfiguration (2). The artist knows how

(1) *Le Miroir du Ciel natal*, p. 212.

(2) See his poems on *Les Réverbères*:

'The street-lamps are little cages in which the flames have taken shelter from wind and rain; weary birds frightened

to quicken our sensibility to new and deeper impressions by the subtle magic of his style. As he gazes upon old miniatures or a faded arras — as he looks in the gloaming at the flowers in his lonely garden, at the silent rain of their petals — the sorrow of beautiful things, of the dumb victims of a destroying fate, lies heavy upon his heart. At the same time we realize that there is in these objects something which before eluded our apprehension, an indwelling spirit, whose message strikes now upon our mind with a strange intensity. Rôdenbach loved these sad things; he felt an instinctive pity for his humble companions, for their poignant agony in the twilight and the submissive passion of their death, as they disappeared in the rising tide of the nocturnal gloom; conscious of their melancholy beauty, he yielded to their tacit influence.

‘Night is approaching, it is now quite near, — symbol of the death of which we were too forgetful; — the shadow is deepening; everything already turns towards the night; — only a lily emerged for a longer

by the mystery of the horizon, they know how frail is their golden flight and they prefer to live captive in the glass’.

The street-lamp is looking at its shadow on the ground; ‘is it possible — it wonders — that the golden butterfly, its luminous essence, when reflected on the earth, may be nothing more than the rigid black figure that shuts up its light within bounds of darkness?’

‘O stars, my sisters! — we share the same fate, the same pulsation, as if a single heart were the source of our throbbing and of yours; — we are alike in loneliness, and we can live only in the night. — O, to go out, to be quenched at last in the eternal Dawn!’ — *Le Miroir du Ciel natal*, pp. 81, 83, 90.

time from the gloom. — The pensive knickknacks yield softly (sad to feel themselves like closed urns) to the power of the shadow that gives them a humble death; — and my soul follows the example of the 'inanimate things' (1).

The supreme wisdom is for him to be a self-contemplative soul, to keep the powers of the mind fastened upon its inmost thoughts; a symbol of this kind of existence, calm and yet not lying in torpor, absorbed in itself, he depicts in *Mental Aquarium*, the first part of *Les Vies encloses*. The aquarium pities the sea, the rivers, which are in motion, stirred by exterior life; its only interest lies in its interior pageant. It cares far less for reflections of reality than for its inward mystery, and its only aim is to apprehend what it has of eternal. It has shut out the world, and now it possesses itself entirely, and no wind can destroy its frail inmost universe. His outlook is thus deliberately limited by a firm purpose to never yield to the desire of change, to the attraction of outward mirages, to what he calls 'the temptation of clouds', the lure of the far-winged, wandering clouds.

In spite of his detachment from life, love enters his soul, a love consistent with the dominant mood, attuned to the background, with the same abandonment to sadness, subtilised by pain to the vanishing-point. — 'On the surface of this dead water floats your visage, o unique Beloved! — and your white face smiles in the moon-reflection — visionary, martyred — perishing in the cold water — because my increasing

(1) *Les Vies encloses*, p. 42.

pain blots out all mirages, and the black swans of despair, cruel and wild, gliding inexorably toward the haloed face tear it to pieces in the waves'.

His mental attitude was the same towards his town; the swans, gliding on the path traced by moonbeams — the brilliant patches of sunlight roaming on the black waters on a stormy day — the languid scent of dead leaves — the very outlines of trees and houses, borrow a new significance from his passionate sadness, and the silent tragedy of things seems to take place in his inmost heart. 'Autumn of walls, stones scattering as dead leaves! — Ancient houses, of which the decayed roofs shed, leaf by leaf, their crimson tiles like a dying garden of great geraniums!' Bruges is often evoked by him wreathed with the dying splendour of autumn, garlanded with the ruddy gold of chrysanthemums, veiled with the violet mist of October; it is the season when remembrances seem to yield their sweetest fragrance, as flowers in the evening dew. Among the rushes, brightened by the dancing reflections of tiny waves, the last yellow iris shivers in the chilly breeze, while from the elm-trees the leaves are falling fast upon the chalices of water-lilies and the dark, agate-coloured water of the solitary pond. The gilded spire of a church soars from high-pitched roofs into a bleak, sombre sky, tinkling with the crystalline melodies of 'carillons'. 'The music falls upon the roofs and the black gables as a bouquet of sounds, in withered garlands, in invisible lilies, in petals so slow and pale that they seem to drop from the brows of dead years'. Over the winding streets and the bridges arched upon the sepulchral depth of deserted waterways, over the sandy downs crowned

with wind-mills, is diffused the hesitating luminosity of rainy days, when the fading light revives, in continual alternative, into a tender glow, as the clouds open and close, chased by the fitful gusts of the seawind.

Rodenbach described this scenery with the exquisite workmanship that such a subject demands, bestowing on his pictures a kind of dramatic vitality, as if they were representations of tragedies acted in silence and mystery — tragedies of which the characters were the living personalities of things. This apparently narrow poetic world allowed him full scope for the expression of his own individuality, because it was in itself complete, held indissolubly together by mystic affinities, a thing of harmonious beauty.

Émile Verhaeren.

The work in which Verhaeren first revealed his personality is the lyrical trilogy *Les Soirs*, *Les Débâcles*, *Les Flambeaux noirs*. It was written during that period of the Romantic movement, when the poetical current, not only in France, but also in the neighbouring countries, was dividing into two streams, one of which continued the traditional course, while the other swerved aside and went wandering through the forest of Symbolism. What gives Verhaeren's poems their peculiar character is the combination of Hugo's and Lamartine's styles with the dark thought of Baudelaire and the graphic vigour of Gautier. But there is a new strain in his soul, and here he records with a forcible form a set of original, wild, deep impressions.

Les Soirs are essentially a mirror of the hopeless dejection of his spirit, *Les Débâcles* reveal the disease of his mind, and *Les Flambeaux noirs* show us the gloom of a darkened soul, the last stage of his intellectual illness.

In *Les Soirs* he limits himself to sing the tragic splendour of sunsets, the desolate grandeur of midnight

skies ; his world does not know either the freshness of dawn or the radiance of noon ; the blood-red glare of a perpetual afterglow broods over the horizon of his dreamland. The lonely marshes — glittering with metallic iridescence through tufts of rushes — reflect as a broken mirror the dying sun ; no breath of life is blowing upon this wilderness, no breeze wrinkles the imprisoned river, stretching far in scattered pools to a sky of greenish vapours and flaring crimson clouds. — ‘ The evening skies shed the blood of their wounds on the marshes, as on red mirrors set to reflect the martyrdom of the evenings ’ (1). — ‘ An evening sky, full of purple hues, of crimson rivers, is rotting beyond the dwindling plains, and violently, with its clouds, as with powerful fists, it crushes the sun upon the greenish horizon ’ (2). In a poem of 1886, published in *Les Bords de la Route* (3), he had already evoked a landscape of a similar character. ‘ Look at the proud grandeur of a stately twilight, spreading, with reflections of hidden torches and mirrors, through the many-coloured, fragrant evening ; — the corpse of the day is lying on the pasture land, and black ravens are soaring among the golden gleams and the flecks of gall of the decaying sunset ’.

When Verhaeren has to express his essential emotions — a hopeless sadness, a wild sorrow — he has only to draw upon a large treasure of images

(1) *Poèmes* [Les Soirs, Les Débâcles, Les Flambeaux noirs], Paris, ‘Mercure de France’, 1895, p. 19.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 67.

(3) Paris, ‘Mercure de France’, 1895, p. 17.

accumulated during his long hours of solitary and intense contemplation; and the outcome of the mystic wedding of his soul with the external world is a morbid and deep poetry of nature, his mournful ideas pervading all things with a strange, vehement life, his peculiar feelings casting on the landscape a lurid shadow, where no sense of joy, not even a sweet melancholy, can survive. The trees, in their mantles of dusty gold, seem to go as weary pilgrims towards a never approaching goal, on the plains lying dead under the autumnal clouds hanging motionless in a leaden sky; — the woods, when the blast is not wringing their gnarled boughs, shudder with the terror of eternal pain; — the cliffs raise their impotent wrath, their dumb despair, to the sunset glowing with a bitter, vain passion; and no one shall know the mystery of the tortured stones, and no one shall tell when an unseen hand will close the lids of the stars' diamond eyes. 'What steps, like tolling bells, — what cohorts will come and break the eternity of the dead hours of this weary midnight, — and close for ever these eyes of stone, mystic golden crystals, between the eyelids of this weary midnight?'

Autumn is to him no time of slow and melancholy decay, but a bright outburst of life, the supreme and fullest bloom of the Rose of Nature, the apotheosis of the magnificent forces ruling the world, and yet the dominion of an imperial, solemn Form, whose head is crowned with the diadem of Death. 'See how October, lazily, heedlessly, is growing and dying in this scenery; apples, clots of fire — grapes, beads of gold! My dream would be to die in this way, under a supreme harmony of colours and songs flowing

together, — with the golden lights of sunsets in my eyes !’

His mind is haunted by funereal images ; night is to him the vault where are lying unknown heroes who died on their roads to glorious goals — the stars burning round the gigantic catafalque as glimmering tapers. ‘ A golden catafalque rises in the distance, when the stars are lifting their rows of lamps towards silver glimmers streaking the black vestibules of temples far away. What is closed in this coffin ? The heart of men of shadow...’ Nature shows him only symbols of universal death ; the moon — a wan maiden in her golden coffin — is carried down the ebony staircase of clouds to the tomb waiting for her in the depths of a desolate lagoon. And his own face, his haggard, careworn countenance looks like the sepulchre of his blighted hopes, of his dreams all turned to dust.

Ton front, comme un tombeau, dominera tes rêves,
Et sera ta frayeur, en des miroirs, la nuit (1).

The tower in which he lives has two windows looking on opposite sides. From one of them his sight stretches over gardens and a fabulous sea to the horizon gleaming with visions of the Past. From the other he beholds huge towns, and mankind in painful effort, and ships steaming out of a cloudy horizon where breaks the uncertain dawn of the Future. On one side it is, sometimes, as with Rodenbach, the rosy and golden lamps of a dead town, swans on moonlit

(1) *Poèmes*, pp. 69, 82.

canals, the agony of flowers in secluded rooms; or it is a small fishing-town of Flanders, its brown-sailed boats, its harbour where only a lantern gleams on the wharf, a dim emerald in the misty evening. Like Gilsoul and Villaert he paints the poetry of dying towns, ancient walls, scarred like old faces bearing the marks of numberless sorrows, reflected in stagnant canals, belfries upraising the gilt dial of the clock like a brazen shield to the rays of the setting sun, the roofs of gabled houses sharply outlined in black on skies of burnished gold. The medieval ages are to him a sumptuous vision of jewelled queens, of warrior-kings falling with a proud gesture on the death-field; the poetry of cathedrals, the ardour of faith contrast with barbaric cruelty, the glow of burning towns, the tragedy of treachery and poison played in shadowy halls glimmering with the wealth of plunder. He sings the glory of Flanders, the struggle for liberty; his figures — grim, majestic shapes, heroes and thinkers, with visages of iron will, of undaunted energy — stand out from a background of gloom and fire. Here he lets his fancy spread its wings in wild flights. On a balcony a lonely princess, in a green dalmatic embroidered with rubies, a gold tiara studded with opals on her red hair, gazes with azure dreamy eyes at the silent tragedy of the sunset. On the lake of turquoise and emerald the royal swans come at evening, raising proudly their crowned heads; they are the kings of the legends, transformed by a sorceress. The gardens overflow with rainbow-coloured exotic flowers, among which flit the flaming birds of the Tropics and peacocks display the sapphires of their plumage. It is a variegated world, like a wizard's glass sphere.

In *Les Heures Claires, Les Heures d'Après-midi* (1) the expression of the scene is one of serenity and joy; the air has the transparency and the prismatic reflections of a crystal; purple and silver butterflies flit from chalice to chalice; the grass is blue with the last haze of dawn, still clinging to the emerald grass-blades; in the all-pervading shower of white light, faint violet shadows lie on the gravel, bracelets of dew-gems hang on the boughs; lulled by a perfumed breeze Care lies asleep on the flowers, Joy sings ecstatic ditties. Here pomegranates show the pale rubies of their heart among translucent amber-coloured grapes. Then the evening light spreads illusive beds of irises on the ponds; and now it is night, and diaphanous flowers are dying in the moonlight, and the hawthorn's honeyed fragrance floats on the breeze.

In *Les Moines* he leads us into holy gardens where white chalices of purity and peace emerge from the thorns of sorrow, and an unearthly light, as of a divine sunrise, illuminates the apparition of dreaming Angels. Here the prayer rises from the heart of monks as a blossoming lily, in the supernatural stillness which broods on this entranced land, enclosed by austere mountains and lonely forests. Here the only motion is the reflection of flying Angels mirrored in the ponds; here the pallid hands of monks are joined in prayer, in a supernatural stillness. 'It is the hour when the Angels, in wreath-like flight, come down again to gather in the plains of silent air the unearthly lily that perfumes the legends; — and such is the silence round the cloister, and such the mystery

(1) Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1917.

spread over the horizon, that they can hear the chaste beautiful lilies grow upon the mountains' (1).

On the other side it is the tumultuous life of big towns, the elation of rushing force, minds of thinkers and muscles of workmen, tense, vibrating in the effort. Long trains start wearily on the huge viaduct curving along the quays, silhouetted on smoke-clouds trailing on sooty roofs and grimy walls, the sunset glowing like a red-hot iron bar in the black horizon. The town is rapidly encroaching upon the country; where once smiled pastoral cottages and gold-lit orchard trees, now rise grim rectangular buildings; roses of fire burst from the melting ores, instead of flowers. Vice and sin crouch in the town as in a den; — but the poet still hopes that the fields may be again, some day, the source of joy to mankind — 'cups brimful with verginal clarity and health'. He likes to steep his mind in these tumultuous whirlpools, London, Liverpool, Antwerp, to wander in the din and glare of huge, busy harbours, among the ships, big liners that have come from the glamour of tropical seas, steamers that have wreathed grimy garlands of smoke round the glittering spires of icebergs. The sun sets behind the dusky hulls, folding a crimson fan of weary beams; the sinister appeals of the tugs echo in the twilight, the gaunt cranes swing their arms with weird gestures in the gathering night. Like Meunier and Brangwyn, like Pennell, he portrays the human effort, the world throbbing with life; mankind is

(1) *Les Moines*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1895, 'Soir religieux', p. 185, and cf. 'La Clémence' in *Les Visages de la Vie*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1916, p. 29.

a torrent, rushing, raging through obstacles ; mountains are cleft, hills levelled, seas dried ; the power of destruction is fighting with the power of creation. The world is reflected in his soul as in a red mirror, where everything is changed into a flame, a fire ; everything acquires a new life and is changing rapidly ; we see the diffuse, slow working of forces concentrated and quickened. — We see the reflections of furnaces mingle with the blood-red beams of sunset slanting through the mist, — ships sailing to the unknown, under unknown stars ; the lighthouses shine along the coast as golden-hearted flowers ; their reflections tremble on the dark waters, luminous fingers pointing to the infinite. We see the trains, rushing out of populous towns, between rows of mournful, tomb-like houses, crossing like swift, ruby-eyed adders desolate plains, entering far stations aglow with many-coloured lamps, rumbling and clattering as they slaken their speed along the platforms swarming with eager silent crowds. *Celle des Voyages* (1) represents the lure of the exotic. It is she who fills the heart of man with an insatiable craving for far travels by land and sea. And first she appears embodied in the figure-head of a ship, — her arms stretched from the prow to visionary horizons ; her eyes reverberate on the waves their hallucinating glow ; her red hair burns as a torch in the gloom of the storm. Then she is imaged by a train ; she bounds in thunder over bridges spanning firth and mountain chasm ; her eyes are the living

(1) *Les Vignes de ma Muraille*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1898, p. 153, and cf. 'Le Voyage' in *Les Forces tumultueuses*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1902, p. 161.

coals of the furnace, her hair is the smoke ascending from the engine to the lamp-lit domes of stations, at night; the sound of whistles is her voice, a cry of anguish, an appeal to the infinite.

He describes the tentacled town, its bridges tressed with iron, its columns surmounted with Gorgons' faces, — grim by day, a glowing octopus in the night, with its ossuary all around. And over the town reign, invisible, the Ideas; we dream of them, far away among the suns, — leaning on the elbow, triumphal, 'unchanged through red dawns, dusky moons, vermillion sunsets'; they are Justice, Pity, Beauty. Meanwhile the search for scientific truth is going on in 'laboratories, observatories, amidst telescopes, monumental crystals, diapered minerals, swords of vergin sun steeped in prisms, glowing crucibles'; the conquest of matter is pursued in these buildings, similar to Solomon's House in the Atlantis of Bacon. Thought is obstinately darting towards truth through the facts, rising from facts to laws, in anguish and hope; life is scrutinised by monstrous or fastidious eyes, from atom to star; the humble and attentive scientist struggles to find the rhythm of Nature's laws. 'The world is made of stars and of men' (1). — 'Up there, since what times, in what deep gardens of the skies, round what suns, in the fulgor of the energetic space, are the myriad swarms of tragic planets turning? Some star has hurled them out and they fly, like bees, among the bowers of the golden ether; and each turns

(1) *La multiple Splendeur*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1917, p. 9.

round its maternal star. O, the great white silence and the strict universal order presiding over the unbounded, rumbling race of the golden orbs round their natal fire, and the monstrous and logical swarming, the leaves of flame, the bushes of fire, spreading farther and farther, climbing higher and higher, living, dying, multiplying, illuminating and burning each other, like the jewels of an unfathomable diadem rising rows on rows !'

We find a symbol of this aspiration in *Les Cordiers*. Along the downs, on the outskirts of the village, in the ardent and weary evening, the old visionary ropemaker, stepping backwards, combines in his hands the threads coming to him from afar, — out of the infinite. One hears his wheel humming, turned by invisible hands ; on the rakes upright along the path the hemp cords stretch their tresses. Out of the dizzy distance he draws to him the horizons, both of the Past and of the Future. Once it was a wandering, mystic life, when the hand of God traced a road of gold towards the blue Chanaans in the depth of the twilights ; once it was a fervid existence, when the white Cross of Heaven fought against the red ensign of Hell. The Present is painful effort, Future a dim vision of hope (1). The poet insists especially on the union of intuition and scientific research ; in the serene distance a double staircase hangs its blue steps ; Dream and Science are ascending it, and, though they started from opposite sides, will meet on the top.

(1) *Les Villages illusoires*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1898, p. 70.

Yet in *Celui du Savoir* is represented the failure of science to cope with the supreme problems; Revelation alone can show the absolute truth and point out the right way. The proud sceptical scientist has vainly looked for certainty in crumbling systems and shifting theories; always baffled by error, he cannot find out the first cause; and now study means to him a hopeless effort to drive away some doubts only to be confronted by new ones. The stars burn without illuming the desert of darkness beyond, the wilderness that no man can explore. And this symbolic figure is followed by *Celui du Rien*, the embodiment of despair looking on the phosphorescent sea of death, with an ironic laughter before the universal sepulchre, brooding on the leprous horror of disease and corruption. His words are a development of Hamlet's theme: 'Your worm is your only emperor for diet; — your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service; two dishes, but to one table; that's the end'. *Les Pêcheurs* (1) are emblems of intellectual perversity, of lonely thinkers, blind to the eternal laws, building up with fastidious care vain, perishable systems. The old anglers are fishing on the river, at night, side by side; yet, isolated in the mist, they never see, never help each other; they fish up misery, disease, remorse, standing in their boats, where the motionless flame of a red lantern is aureoled with great haloes of blood. Their work is their ruin. Weary, and yet intent on the black water, lost in their dark torture, they never

(1) *Les Villages illusoires*, p. 15. — *Les Apparus dans mes chemins*, pp. 106, 114.

think of the sky, of the miraculous stars, of everlasting truth.

The atmosphere of his dreams is stifling as the blue, poisonous air of Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*; his spell-bound, visionary soul has no power to disentangle herself from the net of incoherent images, subtly woven by a black magic. Baudelaire's influence is to be detected in the dark melancholy of his general tone, but especially in the phantoms hovering above that 'Mare Tenebrarum' in which his soul is drowning. In *Heures mornes*, *Le Départ*, he leads us to the dusky, limitless land, once visited by Baudelaire and De Quincey in their opium trances; the lines of the French poet,

Sur le fond de mes nuits Dieu de son doigt savant
Dessine un cauchemar multiforme et sans trêve,

'On the background of my nights the finger of all-knowing
[God
Draws, without respite, a many-shaped nightmare',

are the keynote of several eerie poems contained in *Les Débâcles* and *Les Flambeaux noirs*. Idols of gold rise on pedestals of basalt in the twilight; idols of black marble stare at him in moonlit caves, with the gleam of fateful stars in their eyes of precious stones. Satanic guiles embodied in ghastly forms, they allure his soul with their wicked irresistible smile; they descry his inmost thoughts; a cruel serenity sits on their foreheads, the serenity of inexorable destiny. 'Black idols arise in the desert of my heart; — they stand upright, heavy blocks of wood, ornamented with horns and stones; — with their eyes like the eyes of wolves,

with their eyes like the moon, at night they are staring at me; — they are the motionless horizon of my tumultuous sky, whose blue depths have been raided by ancient storms; — they are my eternal, torturing gods'. In the following lines this appeal comes to him through the barbaric pomp of Indian scenery. 'O, this craving to be, all at once, the hieratic monster, of a black brilliance, under the ruby-studded portico of a temple, in Benares, — and to look, tragic impassive witness, at the mythic heaven, where the dreadful Siva furiously drives his chariot drawn by horses with flying manes, tracing golden ruts through the clouds; — the axle-tree is glittering, the chariot of fire thundering; — the wild steeds rear on heaps of slaughtered men; — scarlet, the sea appears in the distance, with its million eyes' (1). We observe in *Le Gel* (2) the formation of a mystic figure in the poet's mind, deeply affected by the majesty of a serene winter night.

Silent are the woods, the sea and this great sky
And its steady, darting effulgence!
And nothing will change this essential order
And this realm of sharp, corrosive snow.

And one is seized by the dread of an everlasting winter,
And of a god suddenly arising, stately, radiant and glacial.

He has vainly endeavoured to wring the secret out of their lips, vainly questioned the awful figures, whose unfathomable eyes glitter as phosphoric jewels in the

(1) *Les Flambeaux noirs*, 'Les dieux', pp. 183-5; *Les Débâcles*, 'Là-bas', pp. 97-100.

(2) *Les Soirs*, p. 37.

gloom. And all that man has done, goaded either by necessity or by the desire to increase the amount of joy allotted to him, appears to the poet unprofitable and wasted. Both the crumbling hut, so utterly sad and forlorn in the gathering night, and the monstrous town swarming with people, where mankind bows to the lust of gain, kneels before the golden idol, — both these expressions of human life seem to him symbols of a useless fight against the laws of an inflexible destiny. ‘Rising, like a nightmare, in the voluminous yellow smoke, in the fogs, — the inextricable town, great with the evening glamour, is seething, reeking; — behold! London is dreaming its huge dream of gold, London is tossing in its feverish sleep. — O those hands lifted in prayer to gold, those monstrous hands stretched toward gold, — and then the racing of million steps to the Tabor of gold, towering vast and massive far away in some immense dream!’ (1).

In *Toute la Flandre* he has expressed his love for his native country, even for its most desolate regions. ‘Hills of sand rise along the crying and sobbing of waves on the desert shores of Flanders, from end to end. It is a land of trial and anguish, a land of wrath when the winter billows raise higher and higher in the mist their funereal monuments of water’. Sad and desolate they are, and yet his heart always turns to them, as the boat of which he says in *Un bateau de Flandres* (2). ‘Her crew were dead, when she —

(1) *Ibid.*, ‘Londres’, p. 45.

(2) *La Guirlande des Dunes* in *Toute la Flandre*, Paris, Mercure de France’, 1920, pp. 206, 210.

a mere wreck — came back, after many a day of terror and storm, to her native shore'. In his first poems he had sung the undaunted power of his race, Artevelde and the Flemish heroes, the wild beauty of mediaeval times, of ages of war and freedom; he had descended into the forgotten tombs of the kings of old, and, descrying among the royal dust the ruby ring and the jewelled helmet, had exalted the renown of his native country. 'They passed along the fields, the harbours, the castles, — and they suddenly fell down, bleeding out their heart; — then their corpses passed, sun-like, into the legends' (1).

But, afterwards, he shut out of his mind the dream of ancient glory, and having turned his look to modern times he felt with keen grief the loss of all noble ideals, he was struck with pity and disgust at the sight of the crowd without confidence in God, without fervour, without hope. With Jan Steen and Teniers, he had stooped to paint, in *Les Flamands*, the sordid ribaldry of 'kermesses', the coarseness of low life. The windmill in *Le Pêché* (2) symbolises the power of darkness ruling the criminal rabble. 'The old crazy windmill of ancient sins turns creaking, moaning upon its knoll, cuffed by the wind, in the stormy evening. It is the mill of ruin, grinding sin and scattering it broadcast in the fields; it is the emblem of the work of evil going on in the world. The devil's heart throbs in its carcass. And all sinners come to it. Those who sow tares instead of barley — the preachers of wrong

(1) *Les Bords de la route*, p. 42.

(2) *Les Campagnes hallucinées*, p. 53.

ideals, those who throw invisible poison into the sources — the subtle destroyers of happiness and faith, those who burn the stacks of hay and corn — the leaders of revolt, the murderer, the miser, the blasphemer, all come to it, bringing their criminal purpose, returning with the fiend's crafty advice, confirmed in their wicked resolve. And the mill never stops; at night it looks like a gigantic spider weaving its cobweb as high as the stars'. In the grim conception of the poet the mill of evil seems to accord the rhythm of its sails to the rhythm of the stars, 'that turn under the stress of a fatal law, like its grindstones'.

The conception of the power of evil is transferred from town to countryside in *Les Campagnes hallucinées* and *Les Villages illusoires*. The sinister emblem of the wickedness lurking in the sickly fields, in the bewitched souls of the labourers, is an old woman (1) living in a lonely, crazy hut that seems a bird crushed by a blast of wind against the downs. She is the embodiment of sombre love and subtle hatred, the phphetess of evil, stubborn and melancholy, brooding over lost secrets, looking at herself in the cracked mirror of egotism. She comes out in the gloaming and casts her spell on the land; and trees speak at her passage, like hands chopped off the leaves drop on her path.

Such is his tragic conception; for him human effort is not watched by eyes of Angels unseen and blessed by a Hand divine. Although he is not, like most dreamers, a stranger to the aspirations of men, he

(1) 'La Vieille' in *Les Villages illusoires*, p. 39.

gives them no comfort. He tries in vain to intoxicate his mind with illusory ideals; the utmost limit that he reaches is a nebulous pantheism, not unlike Shelley's. In *La Multiple Splendour* (1) Death says to him: 'What you fear is your beauty; Life above and Death beneath the earth tress the flowers of their mystery on the brows of your eternity'. Mankind is to him a child lost in a forest, seeking anxiously a path. An inscrutable destiny rules with an iron sceptre the bleeding, tortured crowd of men, leading them... whither? We are far even from Carlyle's conception: 'The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike, and my Father's'.

When, like a sad Narcissus sitting on the bank of a weird pool, he explores his pale reflection in the dark mirror of Nature, he only perceives the dizziness of terror in his look, the smile of despair on his lips. Even the blossoming of a garden in spring-time is to him but a symbol of the vain magnificence of his dreams, of his fruitless effort, of his ineffectual yearning towards happiness, and also of his solitary and proud disdain. Beauty is dying, lonely, forsaken, along the gleaming alleys; no hand plucks the fine flowers, their perfumes vanish on the breeze, their chalices burst open as caskets of jewels only to reflect the purple of the desolate evening.

Songe à ces lys royaux, à ces roses ducales,
Fiers d'eux-mêmes et qui fleurissent à l'écart,
Dans un jardin, usé de siècles, quelque part,
Et n'ont jamais courbé leurs tiges verticales.

(1) 'La Mort', p. 147.

Inutiles pourtant, inutiles et vains,
Parfums demain perdus, corolles demain mortes,
Et personne pour s'en venir ouvrir les portes
Et les faire servir au pâle orgueil des mains (1).

He is aware of the bitter deception lurking under the brilliant illusion; but he also knows that he will not be able to dispel his yearning to happiness; and he tries to love his ambition in spite of its treachery, conscious that these aspirations are life itself.

Hommes tristes, ceux-là qui croient à leur génie
Et fous! et qui peinent, sereins de vanité;
Mais toi, qui t'es instruit de ta futilité,
Aime ton vain désir pour sa toute ironie.

Besides he knows that he is not fit for the deadly battle which is fought in the world uninterruptedly, without truce, and from his tower of pride he looks in sombre dejection on the pageantry of life.

Tu seras le fiévreux ployé, sur les fenêtres,
D'où l'on peut voir bondir la vie et ses chars d'or (2).

His anguish changes into a torturing doubt, into a wild rush for light and truth; his sadness rises to the despair

(1) 'Think of those royal lilies, think of those ducal roses,
Proud of themselves and blossoming apart,
Somewhere, in a garden worn by centuries,
And that have never bent their vertical stems.

Nevertheless they are useless, useless and vain,
— Perfumes to-morrow lost, flowers to-morrow dead, —
And nobody will come and open the doors
And adorn with them the pale pride of hands'.

(2) *Les Débâcles*, pp. 94, 95, 81.

of a blindman striving to escape from a house on fire, until his reason breaks under the strain and dies in the hopeless struggle.

En sa robe, couleur de feu et de poison,
 Le cadavre de ma raison
 Traîne sur la Tamise;
 En sa robe de bijoux morts, que solennise
 L'heure de pourpre à l'horizon,
 Le cadavre de ma raison
 Traîne sur la Tamise.
 Elle s'en va vers les hasards
 Au fond de l'ombre et des brouillards,
 Au long bruit sourd de tocsins lourds,
 Cassant leur aile au coin des tours;
 Derrière elle, laissant inassouvie
 La ville immense de la Vie;
 Elle s'en va vers l'inconnu noir
 Dormir en des tombeaux de soir,
 Là-bas, où les vagues lentes et fortes,
 Ouvrant leurs trous illimités,
 Engloutissent à toute éternité :
 Les mortes (1).

Considered from the point of view of thought, Verhaeren is rather superficial, easily content with

(1) 'Clothed in fire and poison, the corpse of my reason is floating on the Thames; shrouded in its robe of dead jewels, solemn with the purple hour glowing over the horizon, the corpse of my reason is floating on the Thames. It is going towards the perils lurking in the shadows and the fogs, accompanied by the long, dull sound of the heavy knells, crumpling their wings against the corners of the towers; — it is leaving behind, unsatiated, the immense city of Life; — it is drifting towards the black unknown, it is going to sleep in twilight graves, far away, where the waves, slow and strong, yawning in limitless chasms, swallow for all eternity the dead'. — *Ib.*, 'Finale', pp. 205-8.

flimsy metaphysics. Besides, elements of discord and hatred are dangerously intermingled in his reckless thinking; and the self-glorification of man ends in empty boast. Yet there is a yearning to Faith in his agnosticism. — He says, in the poem *Saint Georges*: 'I set the flowers of my sorrow — in his pale fierce hands; he gave me his valour and marked my heart with a cross'; and mystic figures surround his heart; 'They are Forgiveness, Goodness, Sacrifice and pensive Love; each of them has drunk infinity from the Christian chalice' (1). In his hours of despondency his soul is sometimes stirred by mystic, vehement aspirations towards the Absolute, the Eternal. He had before, in *Les Moines*, clearly expressed these tendencies; he was then leading us through a blessed land of peaceful joy, through holy gardens where the lilies of chastity emerge from the brambles of pain, where the apparitions of dreaming angels illuminate the woods of the ideal country.

Blessed are the men, O Lord, who dwell in You;
The evil of the wicked age has not corroded their soul;
Death is to them like a sun, — and the terrible tragedy
Of the black, atheistic century does not shake their faith.

Dark to our eyes, they are for You like the lamps,
Which the Angels, on earth, with their trembling fingers
Light up in the funereal twilights;
They set them around Your forehead, as an aureole.

Blessed is the holy monk, kneeling
Before the Cross;
His heart is like a tarn on the white mountain,

(1) *Les Apparus dans mes Chemins*, pp. 125, 133.

A tarn reflecting in its pale, dormant mirrors
All the splendour of God flowing upon the earth (1).

In a square of his ideal town rises the statue of an ancient bishop (2); in forest glades where grimly loomed the cromlechs he preached the Gospel to the wild people of the North; he was the clear apostle, the sun of patience and mercy, the sweetness that came down from Calvary to mankind in distress and despair.

The Gothic cathedrals lit by the sumptuous glow filtered through the stained-glass windows — the cathedrals slender and bright as a Madonna painted by a Flemish Primitive, through which the soul burns visibly — had appealed to his mind.

The soul of the ancient day has pierced through the stone
With its sorrow, its incense, its prayer,
And it shines now in the suns of the monstrances.

In the city the cathedrals arise, eternal, exulting in the clear heavenward flight of their clusters of columns and arches. And the monstrances raise their effulgence — gold, silver, diamond, crystal — fixed jewels, like pensive eyes — in the dark aisle, at Vespers, when the evenings invite to long prayers. Framed in tall weeping tapers, through all time, they are the heart of Faith, glowing in the wild town. They reign for ever, enthroned in the gold of bright feast-days — All Saints, Christmas, Easter, Whitsunday — and are the soul of religion alive with mystic glory as an everlasting sun.

(1) *Les Moines*, p. 243.

(2) *Les Villes tentaculaires*, p. 120.

Sometimes, however, this background of blazing gems is dimmed by the ghosts of remorse; there is in him a desire for renunciation, a love of suffering; he would like to quench his fever among the stone flowers of penitential crypts, in the chilly shade of churches where only a crucifix gleams under the violet ray alighting on it from the rose-window. 'I dream of a life in an iron cloister, — a life burnt by fasting, torn by haircloth, — a life where one could abolish, in dumb tortures, only by the soul's ardour, at last all the flesh' (1). His pensive attitude in *Celle des Reliques* (2) is the outcome of memory and self-introspection. She is the keeper of the relics, in a room of gold; at evening, with slow hands, she opens the caskets in which are the memories of the dead. It is she that keeps the rings left on the ground near the grave of the betrothed; it is she who gathers the tears of silence out of the depth of black jewels. She is the pale love of the Past. Looking at medals, illuminated prayer-books, she remembers the poet's ancestors, the traveller, the soldier, the mystic; and voices come to her from afar, like weary barges with drooping sails and black oars on the sea of her heart. She gives the glowing gems the caress of her hair,

(1) *Les Débâcles*, p. 103. — See also *ib.*, *Les Vêpres*, 107-8:

'O this existence in black of mystic old women, — through the gardens in black and the church-porches, — and, for hours and hours, the ecstasy at the foot of a monstrance, at twilight, in some chapels of a cathedral in black, — and the straight shadow of a tall pillar, stretched upon the flagstones, as an arm of dark will!'

(2) *Les Vignes de ma Muraille*, p. 181.

her hands, her eyes. She is Memory, the symbolic lady of the gold room, in nocturnal and effulgent raiment; and she comes to the poet, at evening, and throws a silent pebble in the dead water of his remorses.

This vague feeling begins to glow as a mystic hope in *The Ladies of the Island* (1). They are spinning on the shore of a tranquil bay, closed in the straight folds of their mantles, like Gothic statues. With long threads of silver and gold they plait a diadem of candour, of mystic ardour for their docile head. Patiently, piously, they weave the white carpets that silence spreads under the feet of self-sacrifice, they embroider opals and sapphires on the thin woof that repentance offers to God, they make with wool impermeable garments to cover and protect human distress. — Meanwhile on their hands glide the long shadows of flowers, as the sun is setting calmly at the end of the secluded gulf. The poet dares not land on the isle; he is still too prood, too eager of earthly pleasure; but, one day, the grey boat of his sorrow will come to this strand and be saved by the love of the mystic ladies. The last figure evoked in *Les Apparus dans mes Chemins* is his Beatrice (2), the girl who died long ago, but who is always present to his mind. She leads him to the cathedrals of Faith, and his main effort in life will to be follow the golden footprints that her feet leave on the sand of white silence. He feels her leaning over him, gazing at him with remembering eyes. She is now in a garden so

(1) *Ib.*, p. 176.

(2) 'L'Attendue', p. 141.

full of gold flowers and so blazing with light that even the shadows are golden; here the saintly girl, whose counsels are sweetly helping his heart on the long weary way, is living for ever in the clarity of her new happiness.

The style he adopts to represent the fight between the ideal and the lowest instincts, between 'l'Ange et la Bête', recalls Baudelaire's rough power of image (1). Elsewhere he yields to the influence of Verlaine, and the tenderness of *Sagesse* strikes us in a deeper way, coming after discords of anguish and pain (2).

A true dramatic effect is but seldom attained in his plays; *Les Aubes* and *Le Cloître*, in spite of their dialogic form, remain essentially lyric in character. *The Cloister* shows but little constructive skill; the 'dénouement' leaves us cold. In *Philippe II* and *Hélène de Sparte* he only obtains isolated effects. Perhaps Browning's monologue would have been the right form for these works; with all their vigour of

(1) Cfr. *Les Débâcles*, 87:

Lève ta volonté qui choit contre la borne
Et sursaute, debout, rosse à terre, mon cœur!

and *Les Fleurs du Mal*, LXXXII:

Morne esprit, autrefois amoureux de la lutte,
L'Espoir, dont l'éperon attisait ton ardeur,
Ne veux plus t'enfourcher,
Vieux cheval dont le pied à chaque obstacle butte.

(2) 'Listen: your heart remembers the little village; receive then with confidence, in this weary hour, your good guardian angel, who will robe you again with your childhood'. — *Ib.*, p. 92.

diction, they fail to impress us and we feel throughout the want of a true 'dramatic' imagination.

There is a decline in his later work, in *Les Rhythmes souverains* (1917), *Les Flammes hautes* (1917), *Les Blés mouvants* (1918), where he is merely retracing his steps.

As regards the metres he employs it ought to be remarked that it is in his trilogy *Les Soirs* that Verhaeren first uses the 'vers libre' with a forcible effect. The preceding books are written in traditional forms; but it is in the 'vers libre' that his art shows itself at its best, and to this free arrangement of the lines he will stick in his later poems as to the most suitable medium for the rush and fervour of his inspiration. In its treatment he trusts wholly to his ear; in its utter freedom the rhythms twist the lines with the turbulence of a hurricane wringing forest boughs, and the rhymes follow in quick succession with far-resounding chords. His verse is a faithful mirror of his emotions; it is as changeful as water, flashing under the lightnings of pain, reflecting in a grim stillness the ghosts of his morbid fantasy, quivering in the golden beams of joy.

He lavishes the richest colours of his palette in his endeavour to paint the emblems of his ardent soul, the smouldering ruins of his heroic ideals, the sunset of his hopes, as Baudelaire did trying to portray the changing tints of his hallucinations, 'ces rouges de cuivre, ces ors verts, ces tons de turquoise se fondant avec le saphir, toutes ces teintes qui brûlent et se décomposent dans le grand incendie final' (1). To

(1) Théophile Gautier in 'Préface' to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, p. xvi.

intensify the luminous atmosphere of his pictures, to infuse the intense light haunting his soul into his descriptions, he accumulates gold and scarlet and crimson with an effect of fantastic gorgeousness, wrapping in a golden radiance his fairy islands, 'where the Dreams, crimson-clad, are scattering on the foam with golden fingers the gold flowers dropping from the sun, — kindling 'funereal pyres of red gold' in the bleak November evening, — opening in the shadowy walls of titanic towns 'great golden eyes between red eyelids' (1). As some contemporary artists, with whom he shares the tendency to deal with macabre subjects — as Odilon Redon, James Ensor, Henri de Groux — he likes violent contrasts of light and shadow — tumultuous fights between clouds and sunbeams piercing with fiery swords the monsters of dark vapours — oceans, all pitch-black chasms and dazzling crests of foam — Cyclopean towns of ebony and gold.

He investigated in his essay on Rembrandt an artistic method very like his own; he too was fond of those effects of light and shadow through which objects shine as meteors in the gloom and personages emerge out of dim perspectives, struck by fantastic rays. In *Les Villes Tentaculaires* he has drawn, with the vigour of Sattler's 'estampes', Death as a gigantic gravedigger sweeping, during the plague, into a huge pit the whole population of the town. Even more fantastic is the *Sonneur* (2); in a stormy night the

(1) *Ib.*, 'Les Soirs', pp. 13, 52, 53, 55.

(2) *Les Villages illusoires*, p. 34.

church-steeple struck by lightning is on fire; the bell-ringer calls for help clinging frantically to the ropes, but the tower all aglow crumbles down and the great bell falls upon him; 'and the bell, sinking into the damp ground, dug his grave and was his coffin'. *Au bord de la route* is a series of grim etchings, not unlike the nightmares of Goya; the acid bites deeply in the plate, producing opaque shadows and glaring lights; the artist seems to be haunted by the visions he himself has created. 'It is the hour of pious gloom, when everyone is dreaming of the dead splendours of the great sun which has died. — And, mournfully celebrating the sepulchral consecration, an immense hearse, wrapt in dead and petrified light, rises in my mind, — and, look! the moon, solemnised by the rite of the Dead, having climbed the black sky irradiated with tapers and souls, keeps vigil, in the terror of twilight, with its ghostly flaming eye'. — We do not perceive any penumbra, any transparent shade in his pictures; they are like dusky frescoes on which spots of coloured light would be dancing and playing, as when the rays of the sun are sifted through wind-tossed trees. And from these murky lands, from these blazing horizons, strange sounds arise, long reverberating in his soul — magic, alluring songs of wizards and sibyls, shouts of mad terror, the clamour of routed armies, the crash of burning towers, the echo of clanging bells, voices of agony and distress, the cry of suffering nature. On the lonely moorland he listens to a cry of despair, 'a faint cry, bewailing an agony, far away', — to a knell in the closing night. 'O my soul, sad with the sadness of evening, listen to the bells calling to each other, sobbing over the dead,

shedding tears of bronze, weeping in mournful accord, — listen to the dead calling to the dead' (1).

It is in his lyrical trilogies — *Les Soirs*, *Les Débâcles*, *Les Flambeaux noirs* — *Les Campagnes hallucinées*, *Les Villes tentaculaires*, *Les Aubes* — *Les Villages illusoires*, *Les Apparus dans mes chemins*, *Les Vignes de ma muraille* — that Verhaeren has given us a complete image of his true self, which we only get glimpses of in his plays and later poems. In these trilogies he crosses the circle traced round him by combined influences of French and foreign poets, and enters his own ground, where he can build a fit dwelling for his soul, a sombre and powerful work of art, sad with the gloom and fantastic carvings of Romanesque churches, fervent with the soaring slender columns and aerial arches of Gothic cathedrals.

(1) *Les Soirs*, pp. 36, 63.

Charles Van Lerberghe.

Lerberghe's world is a garden in a divine peace. Fountains whisper and glance among rose-groves or behind waving rows of lilies, birds sing and dart — winged flames — through dewy boughs. At evening the shadows steal out of the woods and draw a blue veil over the dreaming landscape; at dawn mists arise from the rills, and from their opaque background only a white spray of hawthorn, a rose, a dew-bejewelled branch stands out. This calm scenery — luminous and pure as a painting by Puvis de Chavannes — is a symbol of the soul's happiness; she weaves out of her dreams this poetic world; here nature is a creation of her will, a vision she evokes round herself like a shimmering sphere that she can breathe out and dissolve.

'There, as in far mirrors, is recorded the glowing life of ecstatic gardens; there the ripples of material things come and die in short waves, as on a calm shore; there, under an arch of happy blossoms, passes a sphere of azure and water. All the fugitive things reflect themselves in its trembling grace. It is as brittle as glass, as pure as an innocent mind; it holds

all the sky and the earth in the trance of a summer day. Something sacred is in it, as in the eye of man. It is a frail symbol of my joy and of your beauty, it has something of my soul and of yours, — o divine child, who passed among these shadows and flowers, clothed with our earthly roses' (1).

'In my morning prayer I see a great and beautiful garden; — it has a little door of gold, shutting out the world; — and, O, the soul of all things emanates as a suave fragrance in this sacred garden that a soul has created in her dream' (2).

Therefore he leads us to unexplored gardens, half-lit in the profound peace of dawn. Here, translated into a rarefied atmosphere, earthly things are changed, but preserve their character, as in harmonics, or when a chord is struck and the echoed notes ascend through higher pitches keeping the fundamental tone. On the farthest shore of matter, things break into rainbow-coloured spray; then he catches and draws their dying contours. And all this world, shadowy, far-removed, hesitating, blossomed in the joy of the poet's entranced contemplation, seems to quiver and to be always on the point of disappearing as a dream. Even grave, sorrowful ideas look slight and flimsy, as dark-green firs appear violet on the distant mountain-side.

He is only concerned with his inner world, unconscious of everything else but his visions; hence the exclusion from his work of external facts. The clamour of life sounds faintly in the remoteness of

(1) *Entrevues*, Bruxelles, Lacomblez, 1898, p. 33.

(2) *La Chanson d'Ève*, Paris, 'Merc. de France', 1904, p. 41.

most singers; but here, in this aerial castle in a mass of golden clouds, it is absolutely silent. Hedged round by dreams, he purposely ignores the rough ways of the world. When he deals directly with life the poetical value of his productions is remarkably lessened. The influence of Maeterlinck is easily traceable in his first attempt at drama, *Les Flaireurs*. *Pan* is a play of scanty interest; it depends upon a thin vein of fancy, and it seems a hasty work, to judge by its workmanship.

His object is to emphasize hints, far-off murmurs, floating scents, appearances seen by glimpses, — to pierce with a deeper sight through the surface of things. The brightness of daylight is not enough for him. He says in *La Chanson d'Ève*: 'I seek what hides in the light'. His poetry does not convey thoughts or emotions, but their echoes; it does not portray real beings, but their fugitive reflects; his aim is not to render the outside of things but their inward beauty, perceived, or rather divined, by an inner sight. His purpose is the intimation of spirit in matter.

The central figure of his picture is an emblematic representation of the soul, a virginal, joyful creature of beauty. Her eyes are full of wonder and delight; an ecstatic smile is on her lips, and the words she utters are instinct with such a musical charm that they melt into song. Her garments, woven out of the rainbow and moonlight, shed a vague sheen round her; the loveliest things — sunbeams, flowers, glittering waters — compose a frame to her as to the highest marvel of creation; and the spiritual Powers, the noblest feelings, adorn her long, fair hair with gems:

diamonds of chaste joy, opals of nostalgic melancholy, rubies of love.

She is fond of retiring in the penumbra of woods to sing and waft on the breeze her dream-bubbles on the surface of which the world mirrors itself more lustrous and entrancing. She is like a fairy in a cave encrusted with mother-of-pearl, by the sea. 'None of her thoughts goes beyond the blue circle traced by these pale aquamarines on her brow. Her joy is made of simple things, a little sand, a pink shell, a pearl; because nobody knows, as this strange soul, how to make, with the reflection of a far smile, flash out into a celestial dream the sweet and pale glow of this pearl in which faint reflections change into flames and light becomes a song'. Sometimes she appears to the poet arrayed in her full glory, — a Queen of Sheba, gorgeous with the pomp of the East, wise with the learning of ages, the flower of the world.

Que te dirai-je à Toi, qui viens de l'inconnu,
En ce pays de solitude, ...
Chère âme, qui viens du fond des ombres,
Comme une reine de Saba,
Dans la gloire d'une splendeur sombre, ...
Et dont les mains, avec de scintillements
De diamants,
Frappent doucement ?

She is for ever young, she has outlived centuries; her story is the tale of the ever aspiring mind, soaring higher and higher. As Psyche in the ancient myth, as the Helen of Poe, she holds the lamp where burns the eternal fire of love.

According to his conception of nature, he declines to consider material things as the only realities afforded

to our comprehension ; they are for him the pale reflections of the inmost light glowing in his soul, they are appearances evoked by his own mind, unsubstantial and changeful as his own moods. They only interest him as far as they supply him with beautiful images to express his intellectual passion and the visions haunting his spirit. An earthly thing must change itself into an ethereal form, must be transfigured in the fire of his emotions, must drop its dross and merely keep its soul, to be fit to be woven into the arabesques of his world, which is a true lyrical world, a dreamland of pure beauty. He never describes but to portray a psychological condition, and he conveys the subtlest shades of feeling by slightly changing the arrangement of a few symbols. The state of mind in which we can produce a living work of art is only one: the ecstasy of beauty. The monotony of his art comes undoubtedly from this particular aesthetic standpoint, from this clear screen upon which he projects his allegories, his joy bestowing the same peaceful splendour upon all his figures. Since the tone of his feelings undergoes very slight variations, he requires few images to signify it ; a white rose, a limpid source, a twittering bird, a blossoming spray are the few notes needed to compose his tunes. He does not draw much from the inexhaustible store of nature ; without even looking at reality, he is satisfied with delineating the images floating in his fantasy, passing lustrous and rainbow-coloured through the vanishing mist of a dream. The charm of his landscapes is made up of frail, evanescent forms and transparent hues ; the tints of a summer day — blue and gold — are those he most

frequently chooses to paint his allegories with ; blue as virginal thoughts are the hazes trembling on the source, and golden as the soul's mystic joy are the clouds and the waves.

Dans un parfum de roses blanches
Elle est assise et songe ;
Et l'ombre est belle comme s'il s'y mirait un ange.

Le soir descend, le bosquet dort ;
Entre ses feuilles et ses branches,
Sur le paradis bleu s'ouvre un paradis d'or.

Though the soul lives in a solitary land she does not feel lonely in her green and golden paradise ; all things round her are quickened by a mysterious spirit of life ; they speak to her, they sing and dance, they smile from the depth of waters, from the shadow of thickets. The Hours, the bright-winged daughters of the sky, sing to her the merry morning song, the lullabies of twilight ; and when she is afraid of the night, they raise their starry torches.

The whole scenery is crowded with beautiful Shapes. Night walks on the sea-shore and leads the shadows to the rosy gleam of the afterglow (1). ' Out of the depths of the East — calmly and silently, smiling in her sombre thought — comes the sacred summer-night, — step by step, with the shades lengthening in the light. The shadows creep under her like winged chimeras, and the Night leads with her long trailing gold hair, as with reins, this gloomy herd, leads it down to the ocean, where the blood of a divine death

(1) *Entrevisions*, ' Nocturne ', p. 17.

has mixed roses with the water'. — Dawn, in a black armour, the visor of her helmet lowered over her eyes, rides on the mountain; — she carries a silken standard embroidered with blue dragons, which begins to gleam and rustle in the rising morning breeze; and now she discloses her glorious brows, and her steed, opening its wings, soars in the fiery sky. The allegories of Night, Twilight and Dawn are combined in the poem *Gold Boat* (1). 'Three young girls were coming from the East; — one was black, and, steering the bark, told strange stories; — another was brown, and, holding the sheets, suggested the gesture of an angel in her immobility; — but the last had golden locks, which, while she lay asleep in the bows, trailed on the waves; and she brought, under her eyelids, light'.

The fountains arise singing, weeping, in the moonlit night; the rain scatters her necklace of pearls in the sultry summer air, and the flowers quiver and resound harmoniously under her humid fingers; and the snow is a flight of swans over the white velvet plain. He listens to the song of the leaves: 'We are the eternal emerald, — the vast, murmuring forest crowned with flowers as an ocean with foam, the forest where blow in the green shade the intoxicating lilies of dreams'. He discries the demons of lightning, flying over the violet sea, over gardens of fire; their laughter is echoed by the cliffs; they glitter as swords, as scythes; 'look, they cut down, in the furrows of the storm, the harvest of darkness'. The souls of flowers are

(1) *Ib.*, 'Barque d'or', p. 45.

asleep in the chalices; but sometimes they come forth, startled by a flash of lightning, and their eyes reflect the perspective of dazzled gardens. He speaks to the flame: 'Upon this altar, where I have spread roses and myrrh I lay you tenderly, o dead daughter of the immortal sun. And lo! under my breath you are born again, and you are elated with the joy of seeing the light anew and of living'. The flames dance, their golden hair flying on the wind, their blue wings shedding a keen fragrance of spikenard.

Passions and ideas appear to him in beautiful images; he perceives love as a tragic, wild-eyed girl,

Fille sombre au cœur sauvage,
Beauté terrible aux yeux jaloux,

rushing through brambles, carrying a flaring torch in the winter night; elsewhere the allegory is changed into the figure of a god eternally young and fair, smiling among luminous wreaths of flowers. 'He is only light and an everlasting Spring; — he looks at a blossom that awakes, a swaying bough, a ray, a bee, a shadow spreading in the pink and green daylight; — Hope stays on the threshold of his thought — and Prayer, always granted, upon his lips' (1).

The poet sees a girl asleep, and he soon descries ethereal figures round her. She sleeps in her little shadowy room with beauty, goodness and love. Beauty dreams, closed in her wings; she is like a strange sister, and in her hand holds a flower. Goodness lies asleep on her breast, and in her hand keeps

(1) *La Chanson d'Ève*, pp. 91, 56; *Entrevisions*, pp. 44, 55.

a pearl. But Love is awake and watches, smiling, and in her hand carries a flame (1).

The poet discovers on the sea-shore the grave of a girl, whose sumptuous robes and lily-garlands have been turned into dust, but whose spirit is now a splendour and a song, and whose love is still living. Death broke the diadem which encircled her hair, but left the imperishable diamonds on the sand, glistening for ever in sunlight and starlight, as a token showing that the beautiful creature is not lost, that her impassioned heart burned with an everlasting, unearthly fire, that she floats — an invisible presence — in the radiance of day, in the blue glimmering night (2). 'Here all of her, her body, her raiment, her flowers, became dust again, and her soul, carried away elsewhere, was born anew in song and effulgence. But a light brittle band, broken sweetly in death, encircled her delicate temples with imperishable diamonds. As a sign of her, in this place, alone on the yellow sand, the eternal stones still trace the image of her forehead. He, whom the gods have led here, he who has seen them on his way, stays, dazzled, gazing at this splendour that he thought for ever lost. Lost! and sunbeams alight on them! O traveller, you do not know the mysterious meaning of things; only this splendour was not lost'.

And the poet sees a little girl dead, her face white as a moonbeam among the gold hair; but her lips are drinking the water of eternal life from a cup carried by Angels unseen. 'She has reached death and ful-

(1) *Ib.*, p. 57.

(2) *Ib.*, 'Inscription sur le sable', p. 29.

filled her task on earth ; take her, o Lord ; she has reached happiness. The moon shines upon her face and her eyes are full of clouds ; her half-parted lips seem to rest on the brim of an invisible cup'.

The mystic joy, which characterizes *Entrevisions*, breathing throughout the book as a fragrant wind, is also to be felt now and then in *La Chanson d'Ève* ; but we perceive in the latter work that the soul descries a new signification in the simplest events, having acquired a moral sense, a conscience. It is as though the fairy creature of *Entrevisions* had been endowed with a human heart, and, besides enjoying the mere pleasure of existing, were now conscious of the responsibilities connected with life. Once she was contented with looking 'through her golden eyelashes, as through sunbeams' at the images of the world reflected in her magic mirror ; her delight was to entwine the glittering leaves of her passion with the lilies of her thoughts. But sometimes, when she was leaning her weary forehead on her hands, when her eyes were kindled by the remote splendours of a light divine and the words of prayer came 'as a smile of roses' to her trembling lips, she was troubled by a strange melancholy, by a deep craving towards the dreamy gardens where she was born and where she wished to die. 'I walk under blue veils, roses are hanging above my head ; I know that angels are waiting for me and I dare not raise my eyes. The sun kisses me lightly ; I see the ray through my eyelids ; the sea sings close to me. And I do not know why I am weeping. O happiness, just now you have received me in your arms ; o, let me go back into the shade of my sad and sombre gardens, where

I was born and where I wish to die'. And now she is blessed with a new vision of the world, and her song is instinct with an unearthly joy.

Très doucement, et comme on prie,
Lents, extasiés, un à un,
Elle évoque les mots divins, ...
Elle assemble devant Dieu
Ses premières paroles,
En sa première chanson.

O ma parole,
Qui troubles à peine un peu,
De tes ailes,
L'air de silence bleu !

O parole humaine,
Parole où, pensive, j'entends
Enfin mon âme même,
Et son murmure vivant !

Moi, je t'écoute, un autre te voit, ...
Tu es une rose dans ma voix.

His intention in *La Chanson d'Ève* is to trace the progress of evil in an innocent heart. Eve is here not so much the Eve of the Bible as a symbol of the soul. She has a kind of impersonality ; the poet speaks his mind through her lips. The subject is not related in narrative form, but in snatches of song. At the opening we see Eve awakening, unstained, untroubled, to the blissful sight of the virgin world ; the first part is a hymn of joy, expressing the delight of her innocence. ' The bower is closed, impenetrable, all dark with roses ; but I pluck, one by one, the white roses of this blossomy curtain — and gradually, between my lifted hands, whence falls the veil of this

mortal day, appears, pale and wonderful with blue space, the immense flower of heaven'. She walks in a sacred atmosphere, attended by Angels; they rock her to sleep, the rustle of their wings is like whispered words to her. 'They are the radiant horizon where my thought ends; they lean over the edge of my soul; I shine, rose and gold, amidst their white wings. And I palpitate among them like the mysterious heart of an ardent, deep flower, just now blown in the world'. They descend from their mystic country, and, turning round her with flashing wings, enclose their divine sister in long spirals of splendour.

Ce rire de lumière
 À fleur du silence, ...
 Ce frôlement de l'aube
 Peut-être est-ce la robe
 Blanche d'un séraphin,
 La robe d'or et de lin
 D'un ange dont les pas
 Approchent de la terre,
 Mais que l'on n'aperçoit pas
 Perdu dans la lumière.

They are like the Angels of R. M. Rilke.

'In the turmoil of life I may forget my Angel, — his sweetness and his radiant raiment, — his praying hands, his blessing hand; — yet in my innermost dreams I shall always keep his folded wings, that stand behind him like a white cypress'.

'His face was like a landscape, half in joy and half in pain, — now absorbed in a calm imploration — now torn by pain; and his lips were like the stone whence once wonder-working waters sprang, that now lie silent asleep'.

‘ His hands remain in my memory like blind birds, that, when the others have gone beyond the waves to a longer Spring, in the old bare lime-tree must stand the winter wind. — And in his eyes is the splendour of the first day; — but, far above all, emerge his powerful wings ’.

Then comes the stealthy approach of evil, in many disguises : red-haired mermaids, little fairies, and, at last, the turquoise-spotted snake. The magic of evil, hinted at in *Entrevisions*, is re-echoed in *La Chanson d'Ève*. In his earlier work (1) he says : ‘ None of us minds the strange creatures whose song, so simple, weaves — one might say inadvertently and as if in play — around us, in the twilight, a web of enchantment, a tissue of pale, rose dreams, like fire dissolved in the air, a veil that spreads and gradually interposes between the world and us, and out of which we shall not go. — None of us takes care of the fairies, who, mysteriously, with a quaint smile on their lips, trace round us circles of little charmed steps, which narrow round us more and more, gradually closing to us all the wide horizon of the world, circles out of which we shall not go ’. Here Twilight, a wicked fairy, whispering a sortilege, weaves a veil around the soul, a veil of pale fire and wan flowers; and Evening spreads in the air a net of baleful stars,

De ses subtiles mains complices étendit
L'insidieux filet des étoiles obliques.

Here the fairies try to entice her into a magic enclosure, to separate her from her divine guardians;

(1) *Entrevisions*, p. 59.

and they sing: 'Enchanted circle, wall of brightness, enclose and keep Eve imprisoned; let us surround this place so that the Angels may not enter it'. They want to get the soul of Eve, 'that little gold flame'; and she complies with their wish, but refuses their gifts, 'raiments woven of azure and moonlight, jewels glistening like moths of blue fire'; she desires to be free, but feels a subtle despair. 'Why have my Angels flown away? Why are blossoms and sources no more friendly to me? Why all seems afar?'

The mermaids call to her with bewitching songs; concealing their guile with crafty words, with subtle wiles, the Sirens tell her the origin of the world; they sing how the earth emerged as an immense cradle of flowers from the desert waters, brought up by unseen hands, and how they beheld her lying asleep under 'a sky of pale stars and white roses'. Eve descries their sea-green eyes, their floating hair, 'like a golden wave or a long sunbeam in the water'.

Looking at the black river glittering with moonlight she descries wan chalices rising through the water to open in the silver light; they are mysterious flowers, filling her heart with dark forebodings; it seems as if among their pale flames an unseen Power were watching her. 'The wave trembles, black and deep, and all at once the moon flashes out on it. Then she allures, from the bottom of the water, pale long frail flowers, that rise, open, and mirror themselves in her impalpable splendour. Blowing mysteriously, like a deadly foreboding, they set on the moonlit wave their long white tapers. And now I seem to be spied by some strange being — beyond life and yet close to me — invisible in the light'. She feels a yearning

towards the pale queen, the moon, pale as a water-lily asleep on the motionless ocean of silence, towards the unknown realm beyond the boundaries of life. 'O white blossom of the air, flower of the inexistence, in the motionless oceans of radiant silences you shine like death in a desert sky; and all the earth is pale with your light. O moon, what a unanimous shiver ascends from the groves towards your summit of irrespirable peace! What a wild plaint and what a sobbing rise from the waves towards your calm shores! O white blossom, you see our insatiate soul; o, draw us to you, beyond life!' Wandering in the twilight, she starts at the sudden appearance of a stranger, a god crowned with roses, leaning against the forbidden Tree, gazing with despair at a lonely star. 'This evening, I have seen on the skirt of my groves a young god, strange and wonderful; he was leaning with his white hand against the tree of the gold fruits, the tree which it is death to touch. His hyacinth hair was crowned with roses; his visage resembled Love's. Neither my footsteps smothered in the flowers, nor the throbbing of my heart could turn him away from his dreams. He was gazing, in the blue sky, at a star pale and lonely like him, with a long look of farewell'.

After having sinned, plucking the forbidden fruit, she is for some time the prey of an impious elation; but she is soon aware of the ruin of her soul; — defiled by sin, haunted by remorse, Eve yearns for death. An angel is standing by her in the gathering night; Eden, the image of life, is vanishing into the gloom, into death; and she would speak to him, would tell him her anguish; but he is so divine that she

dares not address him with human words. And one day, in the silence that reigns beyond the walls of Eden, an awful Shape glares at her with eager eyes; is it Evil, is it Death? 'Who has risen before me out of the emptiness, out of nothing? — O, speak; do not look at me in that way, in silence. — I am afraid; I will not see you. My angels, come and help me'.

And in Eve's soul a new Idea — Sorrow — appears, with a dumb appeal in her look, among her divine sisters.

Vers le soleil s'en vont ensemble
 Mes pensées, divines sœurs;
 Elles chantent; l'air pâle en tremble
 Comme s'il y tombait des fleurs.

Une s'attarde la dernière,
 Tristement, au bord du chemin,
 D'où monte l'âme du matin
 Et la rosée à la lumière.

Celle-là qui s'évanouit
 Au fond de ses larmes mortelles,
 Ne chante pas, mais c'est par elles
 Que le soleil l'attire à lui.

Death is an angel; when he spreads his wings the Earth is hidden by a bleak darkness; but he does not destroy life, he only suspends it for a while. 'And the sombre Angel soared to the sky, spreading over me his large wings. The earth shivered under an unknown breath, the flowers' chalices closed, trembling, and the world disappeared from my eyes. — Yet I heard the spheres afar; the stars were still alive. — And then it was like a sunrise, when Azrael,

folding his wings, descended with the night immense in their feathers. He smiled at his fugitive shade: A wave, spellbound, now broke at once and fell as a wild swan, and I saw a sunbeam, arrested on its way by the Angel's hand, quiver, and sweetly resume its flight '.

With his quiet joy, his child-like serenity, Lerberghe represents the spirit of dawn in the symbolist movement, of which Mallarmé is the sumptuous sunset, Verlaine the twilight, and Maeterlinck the moonlit night. We are still in the enchanted garden where

tandis que mon cœur expire
Les bulles des songes lilas,
Mon âme, aux frêles mains de cire,
Arrose un clair de lune las,

Un clair de lune où transparaissent
Les lys jaunis des lendemains,
Un clair de lune où seules naissent
Les ombres tristes de ses mains;

but there is an elevation from this sadness into a sphere of thought lit by a passion for abstract beauty. The mind is always aspiring to ascend from reality to abstractions, but these, emerging from the shades of Sorrow, are now crowned with the diadem of Joy (1).

'Eternal is the smile of this garden and this palace. There the blue shadows of the sundial and the fountain mark the hour, there all things seem to be seen in remembrance. Solitude and Dream, like two calm sphinxes, lie stretched on the impassable threshold.

(1) *Entrevisions*, 'Sous les arches de roses', p. 127.

On the top of the gold staircase there is a white door; along the balustrade climb the bindweed's flowers; fine wreaths and arches of roses bend above the stairs. Only sunbeams ascend the steps; and these rays are the train of some invisible Queen, followed by her page, Silence'.

Nevertheless a subtle melancholy comes into his serene domain as an inevitable reflection of the decay and mortality of the real world. This is evident in the scenery tinged with a nostalgic pathos of *L'Adieu* (1). 'All was vanishing in the evening silence and becoming the imperceptible yesterday; things that were dying seemed immortal; others, languidly, exhaled to heaven. And yet, at this hour supreme, keeping our faces turned towards our happiness, lingering in the twilight, in tears, withdrawn into ourselves, we longed, in spite of the vanity of our hope, to live again this beautiful day. We alone could not detach ourselves from the things around us, even at this hour, when perfume departed from the roses and light from our threshold'. *L'Insinuée* is a symbol of happiness visualised by the poet and soon lost; 'she vanished into the deep splendour, dying away in a mirage of flower-dust, quivering gleams, foam scattered on the wind. O calm solitude, and you, boundless gardens still abloom with her presence, enchanted paradise of an illusive love, of which I have reached the threshold and where I come to die, I will not touch even lightly your frail appearances lest I should lose you too. I only wish to behold you, to smile at you from

(1) *Ib.*, p. 131.

the depth of my thought. She is in you, and I am in her, and I recline among wings and roses'.

Although traces of the Parnassian school still linger in some of his descriptions, we perceive that in most of them he has done with the artificial scenery of Gautier and Léon Dierx. It was rather by the spell of music than by gorgeous colours that his visions could be evoked; several of his lyrics suggest with their melody a depth of feeling that could not be conveyed through the somewhat thicker medium of images.

Modern Belgian Poets.

The work of modern Belgian lyrists is the result of various currents of inspiration, of French Impressionism and English Preraphaelism, of the 'Parnassiens' and of the Symbolists. Although their form lacks the exquisite finish of the leading French poets, their verses are endowed with the gifts which go to the making of true art: a sincere feeling and a rich imaginative power. They sing the praise of Flanders, they express the soul of the Belgian nation, revealing a deep affection for their native land, a tender love, which has just now been raised to heroic efforts; and their religious poems bear witness to the fervour of their heart, to a spiritual ground cultivated for centuries by untiring hands. And in all of them we perceive the inmost energy characteristic of their race, and which is manifest in all the productions of Flemish art, in Meunier's vigorous bas-reliefs, in the paintings of Eugène Laermans and Émile Claus, in the music of César Franck.

Fernand Séverin sings a kind of beauty that appeals to chaste and fervent minds; we observe the influence

of Lamartine in this poetry which admits us in the intimate secrets of the heart; it shows a character extremely sensitive, but avoiding any strong display of feeling. There is an austere grace in the simple structure, in the slow, meditative melody of his lines, endowed with a strong emotional power. In his lyrics of love we are attracted by the soul-light that shines in the wistful eyes of his figures. 'You do not know your mystic wealth, and this gift of ignorance is very dear to me. — Be thou the lily fragrant along my paths, and the imperishable treasure of the poor man that I have been. — You had only to open your desolate hands, and unknown splendours rained down from them' (1). His nature is too delicate to come willingly in contact with real life; 'the wisest souls', he says, 'having closed their eyes for ever to the uncertain mirage that troubles their pale sisters, behold the silent pageants of ideal figures passing in their mind' (2). His form, based on classical models, keeps a stately dignity in its elegiac tone; and yet his garland of classic flowers is bitten by the frost of a northern fantasy, of a Romantic autumn; his voice quivers with repressed emotion while he descries a symbol of his life in the sunset clouds. 'O dying days! I have been thrilled by your charm, as by an image of my destiny. In this calm evening a cloud, adorned with all the sunset fires, drifts towards the forest in languid, solitary flight; and the wood shall receive this radiant treasure, in its fall unknown to the children of the Earth!'

(1) *Poèmes ingénus*, Paris, Fischbacher, 1899, p. 60.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 82.

There is a Romantic pathos in the limpid atmosphere of the places forlorn that he loves; 'I evoke, beneath a sky unexplored by human eyes, in a peaceful land, where the sweet widespread smile of a serene light lingers longer than anywhere, a wood all murmuring with Lethean sources'. The same subdued passion is noticeable in this landscape, as clear and tender as those of Chénier. 'These violet evenings and these mornings of mother-of-pearl, full of trembling rays and vague shadows, hardly conceal, under their sacred veils, harmonious valleys where fountains are singing'. His thoughts pass before us as petals blown in snow-flakes from an orchard over an azure lake, and yet we remark that each of them is heavy with the tears of the dawn. 'The leaves were opening, as frail as blossoms; — o, may a slender spray of these shivering branches, where the chilly dew has left its tears, enwreath for ever my weary head!'

On the contrary, the poetic world of Max Elskamp is not made up of evanescent shadows, but of objects sharply outlined; he shows a distinct personal note in his lyrics, founded on a curious realism, vivid as coloured prints. In *La Louange de la Vie* and in the songs published under the title of *Enluminures*, he devoted himself to paint in verse his native Flanders. He loves his hamlet on the sea shore, and its lamps and the coloured wharf-lights are to him as the gleam of friendly eyes; he paints the fishing villages under dawn-flushed skies, the smoke curling up in the bright blue air from red-tiled cottages, the green-hulled barges in the canals, rocked by the pulsing tide, the windmills turning in the freshening gale. 'Look here

at an image', he says to us (1); 'the wind blows and all things bend before it: trees, masts, crosses, rushes, pines; and the sea is howling, foaming under the squall, for the feast of the boats, rolling, pitching, bowsprits in air, waves below, waves above. Then look at the boatman, seated in the stern, laughing; he is glad to trust himself to the sea; it is the life he has chosen, a kind of life dear to all Flemish souls'. — He sings the peacefulness of Sundays, the mirth of simple hearts; 'Now it is morning on the meadows; Holy Mary, look at human life; how it is infinitely sweet, from the trees and the pools to the roofs islanded in verdure! Mary, behold your towns as happy as children, proclaiming with all their bells, even to the far horizon, the pure peace of the Gospel, from the tops of all their steeples, in the golden dawn' (2).

He employs an original method in his compositions which recall the decorative drawings of Gisbert Combaz, and obtains a striking vividness of effects by juxtaposition rather than from association of images. Here is his description of a flower-market: 'Then, it is the great day of gardeners, the day all in white and in rose, — Wednesday, like a bunch of flowers, a day ringing with songs, fragrant with lilacs and roses; — and the prayers, uttered by the clear voices of the chimes, are all granted'. We may note yet another trait of his poetry: the folk-song character of his lyrics; he sings with a careless voice, with

(1) *Enluminures*, Bruxelles, Lacomblez, 1898, pp. 55, 18.

(2) *La Louange de la Vie*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1898, p. 235.

faltering cadences, with unsteady rhythm; but his quaint music makes a strong appeal to minds jaded by the stilted verse of his fellow-singers; and this appeal is bound to last and to increase, being founded on simplicity and truth.

Albert Giraud prefers to the free air of the fields and the sea an exotic palace, where perfumes are burning in enamelled censers, where the diapered floors and the walls of marble are alight with arabesques of precious stones, where princesses are dreaming in enchanted bowers. 'Weary of gold swords and pale jewels, the princesses have closed for all eternity their eyes; their strange voices are silent for ever; they sleep in a remote, vermilion mansion, holding in their hands slim lilies of gems, whose flower-like flames evoke a sunlit garden in their dreams' (1). His allegoric figures are dressed in black and gold brocade, as if the poet had blent the ideas of death and somptuousness into a rich and sombre chord. He adorns his pictures with the quaint inventive fertility that fills the capitals of Romanesque columns with monsters and fantastic blossoms. The most characteristic features of his poetry may be illustrated by the following passages, in which he describes an idol in a palace on fire and the victory of a royal maiden over a wyvern. The first reminds us of some bizarre drawings of Reginald Savage; 'Its shadowy golden hair bristling with snakes, cruel rubies encircling its flat head, the idol looms larger in the rosy and azure incense haze; — all around the

(1) *Héros et Pierrots*, Paris, Fischbacher, 1898, p. 19.

manor is burning and crumbling down, and the flames, bursting into the red crypt, open, like peacocks, the fiery eyes of their scalet tails'. The other with the neatness and precision of its details in its fantastic conception recalls the primitive grace of Carpaccio. 'One day, leaving the sweet mansion of her infancy, her handmaids at the spinning-wheel, her flowers, her clavichord, she has gone forth, as in a trance, defenceless, alone, her heart full of a strange design. — And now she returns, pale with joy, pensive, leading towards the castle decked with banners of victory, the dazzling monster she has tamed, leading with a frail silk-thread the dreadful, ravenous beast; through the hair on its furry sides, as between long eyelashes, numberless eyes of gold, opal and beryl open in the holes of its black cuirass their radiant pupils'.

In the poems collected under the title *Hors du Siècle* he takes refuge in the glamour of the Past.

Puisque je n'ai pu vivre en ces siècles magiques,
 Puisque mes chers soleils pour d'autres yeux ont lui,
 Je m'exile à jamais dans ces vers nostalgiques.

In the sequence of rondels, entitled *Pierrot Lunaire*, we meet with the same quaint images, curiously attractive in their intricacies, distorted, as if the poet's fancy refashioned natural objects into queer shapes; they are like apparitions rising and fading away on stagnant waters; they come on us with a sensation of surprise, with the unexpected strangeness and grace of Japanese prints. 'The melancholy storks, whitish on the black horizon, have seen the slanting fires of a great sun of despair. A pool, full of metallic

eyes, reflects on its tarnished mirror, where the last relics of the day are still shimmering, the images turned upside down of the melancholy storks'. The tricks of fancy are rendered with rare skill by means of the insistent refrain, of the elaborate technique of the rondel. In these short strains we see him under two different aspects: as a painter of grotesques, depicting with the humorous fantasy of a Breughel, with a suppressed smile, a motley people of Italian masks and Pierrots, and as a subtle musician, calling up with the eerie notes of a sylph warbling on his tiny lute, an enchanted wood, where the wild glances of elves and fairies gleam amid shadowy boughs. But in all these ditties there is a curious mingling of bizarre imagination and of penetrating sadness, the former element getting the upper hand in such a poem as *Violon de Lune*, the latter, with a tragic solemnity, in *Les Croix*.

'The soul of the quivering violin, full of silence and harmony, dreams in its varnished case a troubling, languid dream. Who, with a sorrowful hand, will set vibrating in the infinite night the soul of the quivering violin? — The Moon, with a slim, slow beam, as with a white luminous bow, is caressing with agonising sweetness, the soul of the quivering violin'.

'All beautiful verses are large crosses, upon which the poets are hanging, blood-stained, blinded by the vultures that wheel round them in a grim flight. Far from the drunken clamours of the mob, the poets have died, and the setting suns are like royal crowns over their heads. All beautiful verses are large crosses'.

Subjects of a similar character are treated, with a

lighter touch, in the poems of Valère Gille (1), whose *Château des Merveilles* is especially akin in its delicate fancy to the rondels of *Pierrot Lunaire*. — We are in a little garden of box-trees and yews, trimmed into curious shapes, with a background of 'tall horse-chestnuts in full bloom, kindling their rosy candles as Christmas-trees' (2). And it takes on a quaint charm in a night feast; 'white and red Venetian lanterns, bunches of golden grapes cling to all the boughs; silent gondolas on misty ponds, gliding under the inwoven fires of Catherine-wheels, throw dazzling rockets; — and suddenly the fireworks, orange, blue, green, spread on the darkness a glowing peacock tail' (3).

On the other hand, in such a poem as *Psyché* he shows a serious and pensive attitude of mind.

Sur la table d'onyx se consume la lampe;
Le désespoir habite en son palais désert,
Et l'ombre de la nuit jusqu'à son âme rampe.

Trahissant sa promesse elle a voulu savoir; —
Elle sait désormais que le désir l'enchaîne
Aux objets décevants d'un monde inférieur
Qui fuira sous la main ainsi qu'une ombre vaine,
Et tentera les sens sans assouvir le cœur.

.....
Accepte la Douleur qui te prend par la main —
Redresse ton front las, et poursuis ton chemin

(1) *La Cithare*, 1897; *Le Collier d'Opales*, 1899; *Le Coffret d'Ébène*, 1901.

(2) *Le Château des Merveilles*, Bruxelles, Lacomblez, 1893, page 14.

(3) *Ib.*, 'La Fête de nuit', p. 27.

Sans faiblir, à travers ce séjour de l'épreuve ; —
 Dompte le vil désir qui t'enchaîne à la terre ; —
 Les yeux fixés au ciel, marche vers l'Idéal ; —
 Marche ; et régénérée, et le front radieux,
 Le visage éclairé d'un auguste sourire,
 Remonte vers la sphère immobile des dieux (1).

In Iwan Gilkin we have a kind of poetry which is the product of a morbid sensitiveness rather than of a deep intellectual fervour, as in Fernand Séverin ; we are shocked by the sickly exuberance of his fantasy ; he introduces on his shadowy stage the horrible and the foul ; his poems, where we often meet with strident notes and wild similes, are like scentless flowers buried in a cave, or rising from the poisonous ooze of a sombre marsh. Besides, his work is spoiled by a too strict imitation of Baudelaire. He is overcome by the tyranny of the senses, and the pleasures he is hunting for leave him perpetually dissatisfied ; and yet the poignancy of regret reveals an unquenchable aspiration towards the Ideal. — Iwan Gilkin and Jean Delville are intimately related to each other, as far as the shaping of visions is regarded ; both are haunted by dreadful apparitions ; wan masks hang in the gloom ; titanic palaces raise their gloomy bulk of iron and stone, suffused with the red glow of burning cities ; the grandiose mingles with the macabre in a sinister, barbaric splendour. In *Le Frisson du Sphinx* of Delville, the poet himself seems to shudder at the quaint figures he has evoked, at the haunted forests, at the grottoes peopled with

(1) *La Cithare*, Paris, Fischbacher, 1897, p. 167.

jewelled idols, at the symbolic personages that emerge with a spectral effulgence from the fuliginous background.

In reaction against this Baudelairean revival — these fantastic pieces ‘à la Jérôme Bosch’, — there arose a group of singers who aimed at a healthier poetical taste, at a forcible rendering of a conception of life based on Faith. Some of them, as Thomas Braun and Jean Casier, are ‘intimistes’, — painters of homely surroundings, of familiar objects, which, however, acquire a high significance becoming in some way spiritualised by the intensity of the expression, — and others, as Georges Ramaekers and Édouard Ned, adopted the emblematic style that we find in Herbert and Quarles, but with modern colour and originality.

Like the coloured ‘estampes’ of Elskamp, the ‘woodcuts’ of Braun possess a distinct aesthetic value; with the characteristic Flemish tendency to family scenes, he finds the source of his inspiration in the interior of a humble cottage; and when he looks outside, he delights in a pure contemplation of nature, expressed through simple enumerations, with an art at once naïve and refined. Thus in *La Bénédiction des Oiseaux* (1): ‘Bless the birds of the forest, that their song may recall the voice of wind and waves, — bless the birds fond of light, that the sun may shine at their last hour, and the birds of darkness, that night may be sweet to their funereal flight, — bless the birds lashed by the surge, that their flight may not go astray and break against the turning fire

(1) *Le Livre des Bénédictions*, Bruxelles, Schepens, 1900.

of lighthouses, but may tell the sailors how near they are to land, to the earth, where are the flowers'.

The same feeling vivifies the fresh and pure lines of Jean Casier and of Armand Praviel. — 'I, the poorest of creatures', says the former, 'I am to see, one day, in all His beauty, God, who thinks of me, loves me. — He hides His splendour behind Nature; if the veil is so charming, what will His own loveliness be?' (1).

In the poetry of the latter the visionary element is interpenetrated with the real; the mists hovering over a pool change imperceptibly into mystic forms. 'The tall trees whisper mysteriously above the pool. It is the hour propitious to the Dead we love; beneath the paling skies, beloved Shapes, triumphing over daylight, appear; phantoms tremble over the water, in the evening haze our Dead are looking at us, and Immortality rises out of the Grave. In the distance, harps are throbbing...' (2). An autumn wood grows by soft gradations into a lofty cathedral, 'some church beyond the world, rising from gold carpets to the slender nervures of the vaulted roof, — a church where one might go astray among numberless pillars' (3). In his utterance there may be heard the elegiac undertone that accompanies the song of a heart trusting to divine compassion (4). 'If our hands let trail our robes of innocence in the mire of impurity, preserve at least in our wasted heart, as in a sombre

(1) *Harmonies Chrétiennes*, Gand, Siffer, 1889, p. 33.

(2) *Poèmes mystiques*, Bruxelles, 'La Lutte', 1900, p. 18.

(3) *Ib.*, p. 16.

(4) *Ib.*, p. 42.

garden, a timid white rose, the flower of contrite repentance, — so that, at the last day, we may offer You its frail grace, and that the dreadful evening may become — o immaculate Rose — a feast of Candour, when, in the place of the sun, an everlasting Rose will open in the depths of Heaven'.

While Braun and Casier deal directly with life, G. Ramaekers uses reality as a symbol; he is in our times a representative of the medieval allegoric school, and in his *Chant des trois Règnes* he revives with modern subtlety the ancient lore of the 'Physiologi' and 'Lapidaries'; he employs their mystic symbolism, without adopting their didactic, passionless tone. He differs from the French 'Symbolistes' because they avoid direct description, and his pictures are often drawn in hard outlines and crude colours as devices of heraldry. He reattaches himself to the 'Parnassiens' with his tendency to bright hues and definite contours; like them he loves the purple splendour of sunsets, the refractions of light on mosaics of precious stones; yet there is not in him, as in the Parnasse poets, a kind of self-effacement behind gorgeous dreams; his fervour vivifies his imagery. The things he chooses to paint are quickened to new life by the spiritual significance bestowed upon them. In *The Eternal Gems* he sings the emerald, 'green like the sea and the sacred forest, clear as the eyes wherein God has set His hope; — it evokes the evening light on diaphanous grass in the peace of blissful plains'; the sardonyx is 'a jewel of fire, dropped from the chasuble of sunset; — it joins sorrow to glory, the purple of Calvary and the gold of the Tabor, death and victory; — it is the unfathomable sorrow of

Mary standing beside Her son, in the evening, on the Golgotha' (1).

From his point of view, the aim of poetry is to discover the ideas latent in material bodies, and to summon up these visionary forms in the mystical air, so that, in his representation, every thing has its corresponding thought, like an emanation, like the Spirits that Blake drew sitting on the chalices of his imaginary flowers. Therefore material objects may either suggest a subtle idea — as in his consideration on precious stones: 'Edens of the funereal depths of the Earth, you alone reveal to us the inmost Mystery that transforms into diamonds of Grace the coals of Remorse' — or they may enclose several symbols in their various parts. Thus in *Passion-flower* (2): 'In the pagan drowsiness of the many-coloured garden, a flower spoke to me of divine Sorrow. Like the head of the Son of God, of the sacred King crowned with thorns, its chalice is covered with purple threads; and the three cruel nails are formed by the three pistils. The tendrils are whips twisted by the fury of the executioners, — and the sharp leaves look like spears. The details of the emblematic flower recall the martyrdom, and the sorrows the sum of which surpassed the numberless sufferings of men'.

We find the same characteristics in Édouard Ned's *Mon jardin fleuri*, though his palette is more sober

(1) *Le Chant des trois Règnes*, Bruxelles, éditions de 'Durendal', 1906, p. 103.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 160.

and subdued. He cultivates his mystic blossoms that spring higher and higher into a fervid atmosphere, towards the eternal Sun. In *Flowers of Eternity* (1) he says: 'My queen, Pain, has cast into my heart, for the vast granaries of the future harvest, the sacred seed of these flowers; and plants of Virtue, Works and Prayers have slowly grown up in my mind, — lifting to Heaven the petals of their golden chalices. — What are now to me the thistles of human frailties, the nightly frost, the sultriness of day, the winds of Egotism and Hatred? — My heart is all a-blossom with suavity of love, — love for the sweet Jesus crucified, — love for all who are the darlings of misfortune, for all the sorrowful, my brethren in Jesus, who are climbing, in tatters, barefooted, the Calvary of life. — Grow, my beautiful flowers, and, when the day of harvest comes, when the Master, followed by the Reapers, appears in the glistening haze of the Dawn, among the golden Suns lighting the plains, the Angels will cut your stately stems with the splendour of your ripe fruit, and bring your radiant bundles into the granaries of the Father, in the eternal Azure'.

The lyrics of Victor Kinon (2) are the songs of a pilgrim in a forest, rejoicing to hear the minster-bells already mingling with the prattle of rills and the rustle of boughs.

(1) *Mon Jardin fleuri*, Bruxelles, Schepens, 1898, p. 51; and cf. 'Les Rameaux' in his *Poèmes Catholiques*, Arlon, Goffinet, 1896, pp. 37-40.

(2) *Chansons du petit pèlerin à Notre-Dame de Montaignu*, Bruxelles, Schepens, 1898.

Ma bonne Mère, enfin, voyez, je suis venu,
Maintenant je suis près de vous, à Montaignu. —

Maintenant c'est magnificat et joie en pleurs
Et tous les anges font musique dans mon cœur. —

Or, enfin, concédez pour dernière faveur
Une chapelle avec des lilas dans mon cœur, —

Où brûleront des cierges roses, nuit et jour,
Ma douce Dame en or qui souriez toujours (1).

With Grégoire Le Roy we look at a widely different side of Belgian poetry; he too, like Gilkin and Delville, fell under the influence of Baudelaire and of the 'Décadents'; but, although not entirely free from imitation of traditional models, his art is more personal, the ideas and the moods having been unconsciously assimilated rather than openly borrowed. His soul lies inert in a kind of languid despair, and yet it is tormented in its inaction by a feverish disquietude, visited by apparitions, haunted by a sense of impending doom. His lyrics are the production of a mind living on recollections, not on direct experiences, overwhelmed by an inexplicable melancholy, by crises of causeless grief, isolated in the midst of a dusky land through which a phantom river glides, — a sad house and yet a place of refuge, the Dwelling of the Soul. 'O, the lonely house, without hope, without love, where Sorrow, one day, came and remained, a mystic and beloved sister. — O sad mansion! Silence is its master; there one weeps, without motive, all one's tears. Sometimes our soul is too full, and longs

(1) *Ib.*, p. 20.

to flee away. Vain desire! One who has wept so much cannot live without Sorrow. — Don't go out; it is useless. You will be as an exile, regretting the house forlorn' (1). Images spring out lit as by lightning flashes, with the intensity of things seen through a narrow slit, or loom, barely visible, under a faint mist; and now it is a visage of ashen pallor, the fixed eyes starting suddenly out of the impenetrable darkness, — and now pale hands rise like a spectral reflection in the night. 'On the window pane of my heart, two hands are pressed, hands of pain, ominous hands, slender hands of Death. Sinister they are to behold, so nocturnal, so moon-pale, lifting towards me their despair, like the hands of a man lost for ever. — No, these hands could not bless; they were cursed, for, having seen their mortal pallor, I wished to die! — And they shine through my house, as two tapers lit for a death-watch'.

His originality does not lie in details, but in the general tone of the poems; a note of sadness sounds persistently in his lines, opening a long-closed door to wild dreams, to impressions never felt before. He prefers a minor key, and recurring rhymes, awaking long echoes, ending in poignant chords, — a vague, weird chanting, as of voices from a world beyond the world.

He is fond of introducing pale, symbolic figures in his dark palaces; they appear and vanish away as the wisp of vapour that the sunset kindles for an instant on the far mountain side, that glimmers — a fairy

(1) *La Chanson du Pauvre*, 'Mercure de France', p. 125.

shape — and drifts away. In lines of mournful melody, which fitly lend themselves to the utterance of a sombre pathos, he shows us the mysterious grace of his Mistress of Vision (I). 'Who is the Lady, that, in this manor of dreams, with its casements hardly ajar, far from the green plains and the horizon of illusions, reigns upright on the gloomy throne? — What are these grey, funereal walls that mirror themselves in the pool, as a criminal in his own soul? — Who is the sickly girl, who is the queen that, since numberless years, is waiting here? — Who are these mystic souls, that, in monastic halls, under lamps of an Eastern pattern, are weaving pale clothes? And whom are they weaving them for?'

We recognise in the passage quoted the imagery of Poe, from whom he also caught that magic of word-melody, which, by means of 'repetends', gradually reveals the path leading to the inmost chambers of the soul. This music becomes more eerie in the second part of the book, *Mon cœur pleure d'autrefois*, where the object of rendering exceptional impressions is attained through a subtler tuning of the instrument. Here the poet, cutting away the non-essential, refraining from a too sharp delineation of image or thought, and always with a touch of reticence, conveys in lines vividly impressive his peculiar states of mind.

In his continual intercourse with abstractions, pondering intently on sensations incommunicable except through manifold and complex allegories, his emotions take shape before his eyes in emblematic effigies.

(I) *Ib.*, p. 175.

'It was evening in the mournful october. — Three women sat spinning the thread of Death. — Through the chinks of the door, the wind howled a tragic ballad, and on the table the gleam of a candle swayed like a dying soul. — Near the hearth, where a scanty bough of holly lay writhing, the three Women of Fate, the three Spinners of Death, were brooding on the same recollection. — All the people of the Past, all the beloved ones, all those who stung them with remorse, had died; they were the only survivors of the centuries, and so old, that, in the depth of their memory, all lamps had gone out, — and they could not find any more in their remote, black soul the lost remembrances of ages past' (1). He never neglects the supernatural element, as some superficial writers are wont to do. 'Hence it is — the voice of Shakespeare (2) comes as a warning — that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear'. His evocations become thereby charged with significance; the poet interprets their meaning, disclosing in a momentary illumination the mystery that lurks in them. 'On the wan pool of my dream, on these dying waters — sinister, sometimes, with the unearthly voice that rises from them — the white Swans of the legend appear. What secrets are weighing upon them, making their motion so slow — what stories enacted in manorial halls, what events veiled from us by the black wings of fabulous evenings? And why is their attitude so stately and proud? —

(1) *Ib.*, p. 84.

(2) *All's well that ends well*, II, III, 4.

Why do we think that they move towards ancient tombs, towards the other world ?'

Poetry, as he conceives it, consists in an endeavour to recapture transient moods, quickly obliterated, as wave-marks on a surf-beaten shore, — to express that longing after things out of reach, which comes to us as a breeze from a distant sea.

The pensive character of the Belgian soul is represented in a different way in Georges Marlow. Two influences are paramount in his work: Verlaine's and Rodenbach's; the latter guided him in the choice of subjects, from the former he caught the sense of verbal harmony. His short poems are conceived in the same mood of Verlaine's tuneful ditties, and, as in the dirges of Rodenbach on Bruges-la-Morte, the main source of his inspiration is his predilection for a dying town of Flanders. 'What land, even if enchanted, may give me the infinite languor of your desolate church-towers, o little town, so beautiful in your slow agony? — Why should I flee from this exile, which, with all its bitterness, still charms my heart? — The voices of the open sea would drown the songs that I love!' (1). He sings the peace of cathedrals that Delaunois has so finely evoked in his paintings, the Holy Virgin 'whose sweet melancholy eyes are lit with reflections of stars', the tapers, 'dream-flowers lighting the garden of souls'. He listens to the rambling talk of the water lost in the labyrinth of the weather-worn houses; the trembling soul of the water is sad, and yet enthralled, as the poet's heart, by the dolorous charm of the place. 'The water

(1) *L'Ame en exil*, Bruxelles, Deman, 1895, p. 57.

babbles for ever and ever amid these joyless towers; it lisps incessantly love-songs. — The merry mariners have died before leaving the harbour; — here and there white feathers glide on the shivering stream, through the reflections of boughs; but the foolish water — where Ophelia lies asleep — tires itself, although ill and weak, to tell sweet idle fancies to these old towers' (1).

A sense of loneliness darkens at first his view of life, but, as he comes nearer and nearer to his ideal of renunciation, the suavity of a mystic repose pervades his soul. 'For You, o Lord, I have left my flowers and my jewels; — and, with a mere waving of Your hand, you have withered the roses of Illusion'.

André Fontainas is, with Mockel, the exponent of Mallarmé's aesthetic principles; but in his book where strict imitation is more evident — *Les Estuaires d'Ombre* — the obscurity of his master is often unrelieved by his deep suggestiveness. He has been too eager to dispense with the precision that is indispensable to convey the rare shades of feeling he affects, and we cannot retrace his dream; the images hover before our eyes without setting into a definite pattern. Sometimes, however, from the dark tangle emerges the beauty of individual passages, such as

Aux havres d'or naguère où s'incurvait Corinthe
Nul éphèbe ne vogue en vœux d'âme nouvelle
Vers les fauves toisons que l'aurore y révèle (2).

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(1) *Ib.*, p. 11.

(2) 'Les Estuaires d'Ombre', in *Crépuscules*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1897, p. 156.

Le fleuve d'oubli sombre où plongent nos cyprès
 Roule l'épais gravier du rêve et des regrets
 Sous le miroir terni de son obsidiane (1).

Now and then we are struck by fine images ; 'in ancient meadows, among pools of water-lilies, she is passing, her eyes tender as amethyst dawns and more sad than twilights on moonlit lakes' (2).

His soul is estranged from life, and pain is to him an abstract feeling, independent from the impressions produced by reality ;

Le rêve est malfaisant, et vivre c'est assez.

Following the example set by Verhaeren, Albert Mockel adopted the 'vers-libre', a metre that, with its loose texture and shifting stresses, its changing recurrence of rhymes and its arbitrary length of strophe, lends itself to various effects of harmony. In Verhaeren we observe the rhythm of a violent passion, in Mockel the soft undulations of a reverie, pausing in light cadences, dying into faint chords. A striking similitary to Lerberghe's visionary art is noticeable in Mockel's transfiguration of reality. Walking on a woodland path he looks at the leaves trembling in the breeze, at the intricacies of the boughs, 'interlaced, like clasped hands, into a harmonious dome ; whisperings of love fill the thick forest, and a hymn breaks out of a myriad of elated voices' (3). In the light playing on a flower of glass he discerns

(1) *Ib.*, p. 166.

(2) 'Les Vergers illusoires', in *Crépuscules*, p. 14.

(3) *Clartés*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1902, p. 119.

the vestige of the exulting flame by which the crystal petals were fashioned. 'Are you not the daughter of Fire? Has not your coruscating chalice sprung out of a free blaze aspiring to heaven, when the ardent soul of the wood, imbued with sunshine, was born again in the spasm of death? And its memory follows you, like a scarlet angel'. In the solitude of the forest ethereal beings are visible to his inward eye (1). 'His hair is spread as a wave of light; his hand holds a flower unknown; and all his mystic whiteness is like clouds mirrored in water; — but what is the radiance that wraps him as in a gleaming snowy raiment? It is a wing; — and, look! the immortal shape of an Angel is disclosed to our eyes. — In the limpid morning, among the shadows of holm-oaks, the divine Wanderer of the Azure has folded his pinions; an Angel lies here asleep. — When he awakes, soaring at once with an irresistible impulse, he will vanish with a clear unearthly cry in the sunrise, like the incandescent dream that crosses the ether when a meteor flashes through the interstellar spaces'.

The sonnets of Émile van Arenberg are a fair example of the Parnassian influence; for these artists, attracted by mere exteriorities, to represent in word-painting the play of colours of a Persian carpet or a Chinese cup was quite sufficient to satisfy the aims of poetry. Therefore they looked for a style lucid and correct, if cold and unimpassioned; and the result was a polished artificiality. Such a style we clearly see in the following piece of Arenberg. 'In the

(1) *Ib.*, pp. 22, 72.

crimson boudoir the lamp, clouded in an amaranth globe, looks like a dreamy moon in dim purple vapours. — Garnets, rubies, cornelians, corals interlaced in incarnadine twigs, mingle in a casket the blood of sunrise with flames of fire. — The whole scale of carmine sings in the flowers embroidered on the carpet. — A vermilion macaw flutters through the room, and its shrill cry bursts like a scarlet stroke of colour in the red silence'.

The spontaneity of Elskamp is reëchoed in the naïve pathos of Paul Gerardy's songs. Sometimes his verse, almost childishly simple, degenerates into doggerel; more often it shows an artist endowed with a nimble sureness of touch. His mood varies with every change of hour or weather; now it is the storm, the tumult of surging vapours — now the gaiety of vintage-time comes like a burst of sunlight into his melancholy.

'Summer performs in the burning skies its tragedy, in which hideous gods come and go, wrapt in gold and fire. — The light sinks and changes quaintly; from glowing embers of ominous gold the huge hurricane clouds are rising in a slow, fatidical march. — A gale blows from the darkness, the bells pray in distress, while the tragedy is going on, played with sombre thunders' (1).

'The starry blue night pales as morning advances; the red-winged sun ascends; look at the world aureoled by a divine rainbow! Look at the benignant shower that makes germinate and grow the holy bread, the wine of wisdom supreme, and new roses. — Say your

(1) *Roseaux*, Paris, 'Mercure de France', 1898, p. 140.

prayer, the prayer of the good strong man, who never complains; for the sun — to make Hope fearless — is now rhythming its golden joy on the sacred vines' (1).

In his love poems we descry a trace of affectation, and in some of his 'ballades' he vainly endeavours, playing with trifling conceits, to give interest to futile subjects. But in the lyrics where he takes Heine for his model the frivolity of sentiment is replaced by a power of analysis through which the slightest emotions are noted, although he is content in his expression with mere hints.

In a somewhat similar strain are the lyrics of Max Waller, who left us a booklet (2) full of promise in its odd mixture of sentiment and irony. The mingled influence of Gilkin and Gille is perceptible in Fernand Roussel (3) and Arthur Dupont (4), while Jean Dominique (5) and Georges Rency (6) follow the inspiration of Séverin. Their poems, as well as the lines of Paulin Brogneaux (7), disclose a soul too sensitive to deal directly with real life. There is a certain vagueness in the songs that they raise in their solitude; but we always find a charm in their clear melody and in that natural grace which is the outcome of sincerity.

(1) *Ib.*, p. 137.

(2) *La Flûte à Siebel*, Bruxelles, Lacomblez, 1891.

(3) *Le Jardin de l'Ame*, Malines, Godenne, 1892.

(4) *L'Envol des Rêves*, Bruxelles, Lacomblez, 1892.

(5) *L'Aile mouillée*, Paris, 'Mercure de France'. — *L'Ombre des Roses*, Bruxelles, 'Le Cyclamen', 1901.

(6) *Vie*, Bruxelles, Lacomblez, 1896.

(7) *L'Isolement*, Paris, Fischbacher, 1901.

In several of these poets — Arnold Goffin and Georges Ramaekers, for instance — there is a strong mystic feeling; in others — as in Jean Dominique and Valère Gille — the religious sense is hardly perceptible, and yet it is not entirely absent; it breathes faintly from their lines as a fragrance of incense still clings to a dalmatic long enclosed in a forgotten chest.

Des anges, maintenant, sont passés dans le vent;
 Ils laissent sur la mer flotter leurs ombres
 Comme de grandes violettes qui se fondent. —
 Les anges sont montés sur la dune pâlie, —

 Mais voici qu'une fille a pleuré sur la dune. —
 Ils sont venus ce soir du bout du ciel divin,
 Et du fond de la mer, et de l'air et de l'ombre,
 Pour s'abriter au creux de son petit chagrin
 Plus mystérieux que le monde (1).

In a few, anxious to startle the public, sincerity is sacrificed to extravagance with a misdirection of the imaginative power. Most of them, however, aware of the seriousness of art, shrink from a forced originality, and their earnestness of purpose is rewarded by a noble simplicity of thought and form. But all are the exponents of a nation that awakes to the full consciousness of its individuality.

(1) JEAN DOMINIQUE, *L'Ombre des Roses*, p. 42.

Modern Italian Poets.

Antonio Fogazzaro.

The poetical work of Fogazzaro, though little in bulk in proportion to his prose writings, is, however — as with Meredith's and Hardy's — far from inconsiderable in quality. The fruit of impassioned meditation, his short lyrics and his longer poems alike leave the impression of a strong personality, of an ardent temper curbed by mystic laws. Poetry is to him essentially the rhythmical expression of immortal hopes, the music of the soul singing out her rapture to her Creator. He finds the revelation of the Divine in a close examination of his inner self and throughout the changing forms of beauty; his inspiration is kindled by faith, by a fervid love of God and mankind, by a deep consciousness of Heaven's ruling and all-pervading power. In his moments of vivid insight he descries with trembling joy the far effulgence from the eternal sphere; the world seems to dissolve like a vast mirage, and a sudden light breaks in his inmost heart. 'No sounds in the mountains, no ripples on the lake — only faint shadows of milky clouds and

brown cliffs; — but the glimmer of the Eternal shines out from a secret depth in myself — like that soft shimmer, which is now diffused by the sun hidden behind vapours' (1). Beholding the mysterious loveliness of nature he feels his soul pervaded by a strange ecstasy, thrilled by an unknown bliss; he is conscious that a spirit broods everywhere, concealed under the shapes and the colours; he is aware of an invisible presence and traces this quickening force in all things exulting in their serene grace. 'I do not know what unearthly being dwells in the swinging wave, in forests, in pensive mountain-tops; — yet I know that it lives, and loves me. — Why is it not able to tell me if it was infused into the sorrowful prison of matter by an almighty breath, — or if it fell here from a lost paradise? — Why cannot it express the griefs sublime, the splendour of everlasting hopes, the ardent desire that it conveys to my soul? — Every blade of grass, every bough, every billow, in this moment yearns tremblingly towards me, would fain speak; but it cannot; — and yet a flame, that is not mine, pierces my soul' (2). We are reminded by this passage of the lines of Wordsworth:

I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

(1) *Poesie*, Milano, Baldini e Castoldi, 1908. — 'Silence', page 198.

(2) *Ib.*, *Valsolda*, 'Novissima Verba', VII, p. 250.

His conception of the world is the biblical one (1). 'Quoniam tanquam momentum staterae, sic est ante te orbis terrarum, et tanquam gutta roris antelucani, quae descendit in terram'. — 'Tu autem Domine in aeternum permanebis, solium tuum in generationem et generationem'.

Like Shelley, Fogazzaro finds a human pathos in inanimate things; the waterfall sends out in sleepless pain its cry forlorn; its voice soars like a message of sorrow over the tremulous lake, reaches — weakened to a sigh — the cliffs of the opposite shore, and dies among the vales as among misty flowers; the blue headlands are listening to its lament that does not change, that sounds night and day as if the rushing waters were tormented by an inexorable fate.

Quest'onda non ha pace,
Quest'onda mai non tace,
Ognor trabocca e piomba
E senza fine romba
Sulle deserte prode.
Il lago posa ed ode;
Odonò i monti bui;
Ogni quiete gode
Del mio remoto pianto (2).

The poet hears the church bells ring at vesper-time over the glimmering lake, waking to melody the

(1) 'For the whole world before thee is as the least grain of the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew, that falleth down upon the earth'. — 'But thou, O Lord, shalt remain for ever, thy throne from generation to generation'. — *Sap.* XI, 23; *Thr.* V, 19.

(2) *Valsolda*, p. 243.

echoes of the valleys; their voices come to him indued with solemn melancholy, as if they were the expression of the distress of all living creatures, of sufferings unknown, of yearnings and passionate supplications. '*The Bells*: 'The light is born and dies; — what remains of sunsets and sunrises? — Lord, on this earth, all, but the Eternal, is vain'. — *Echoes from the valleys*: 'Is vain'. — *The Bells*: 'From the heights, from the depths, — let us weep and pray for the living and the dead, for so many sins, for so many afflictions! — Have mercy on us, O Lord! — Forgive the agony that does not call to Thee, — the error that denies Thee, — the love that does not bend to Thee. — Let us pray for those who sleep in the churchyard; — some are guilty, they say, some innocent; — Thou alone, Mystery, Thou alone knowest the truth' (1).

In *Miranda*, a tragic idyll, we have the delicate outline of a figure seen in the light of a creative fancy, rather than a realistic portrait, — an image ethereal like the reflection of moonlit clouds in a pool. Yet she is one of those creatures under whose outward quiet a flame is alive, burning fiercely; thwarted in her affection, she vainly tries to break the spell of tender memories; the vehemence of the inner fire wears out her frail body, and she dies broken-hearted. The tragedy arises from the fact, that, in the weakness and trouble resulting from the morbid condition of her mind, she does not urge her will to an entire renunciation. In *Miranda* — an early work — Fogazzaro shows himself already a master of

(1) *Valsolda*, 'A Sera', p. 240.

psychological analysis; but this 'poemetto' is a study of that spiritual languor which might be called 'the autumn of sentiment'; the insistence on refining upon Miranda's anguish and the tortures of her secret agony, though it produces fine emotional effects and inspires verses of a profound tenderness, is too apt to fall into the maudlin and the lachrymose. Yet, in the main, the feeling is noble, elevated, the pathos intense. We perceive in the subject a research for 'the psychological picturesque', just as some painters of our time seek a 'romantic picturesque' in landscape and figure-grouping. The same impression we get from *Miranda* is given us by Gaetano Previati's *Funerals of a Virgin*; we are steeped in the same rich twilight of mystic art; we perceive the same sorrow full of immortal yearnings; we see the same pale figures of white-clad maidens, leaning among rows of lilies, in an atmosphere of greenish and turquoise blues and veiled golds. We have the same pensiveness of Dall'Oca Bianca's *Loves of the Souls*, and, in some passages, the more robust thoughtfulness of Alphonse Legros' *Ex-voto*.

Fogazzaro shows a refined sense of beauty in his observations of natural scenery, catching, so to say, the most spiritual aspects of the landscape, when the mountains are transfigured by the purple evening light, or when the lake mirrors the angelic radiance of the morning-star. A sense of mystery clings to his descriptions; a characteristic example of it is afforded by the lyric *Returning from Work* (1), where the boats heaving into sight through the fog assume a

(1) *Valsolda*, 'Il Ritorno dal lavoro', p. 217.

symbolic significance. 'Dense vapours are spread over the lake; it rains. — Far, far away, a wave of mingled voices, sweet, calm, grave, swings in the deep mist. — Looking intently, I only see dusky, desolate waters. — The mystic melody goes on without pause, approaching slowly, sweet, calm, grave, as though some mariners, on a boundless ocean, far from their native shore, at nightfall, were raising to God a simple prayer. — But, look! — the boats, full of singing people, show their dark stems through the mist. The oars come and go amid the fragrant heaps of new-mown hay; an impatient kid stands on the prow. — Thus may it be granted you, when your work is done, and the end of your placid days is come, to steer your small boat, filled with the harvest, to the strand of Mystery'. In *Miranda* he frames the analysis of passion in striking descriptive passages; wandering among the mountains she comes upon sights of awful grandeur or of delicate loveliness; sometimes a soft enchantment fills the air, a translucent paradise stands revealed to her, opening silently on a blossoming height, with its deep meadows veiled by the azure mist of harebells, starred with orange lilies and glowing blue gentians. 'To-day we have been to 'The Field of Flowers', — a pretty name. There, on the edge of a murky chasm, fronting a black mountain, myriads of dainty flowerets were shivering in the wind, as if they had fled from every crag around threatened by the scythe, and were still trembling with fear. — The old trees, the huge Alps, seem enamoured of their timid smile' (1).

(1) *Miranda*, p. 141.

Sometimes the immemorial sadness, the dark majesty of mountains, the silent ranks of pines, the clouds overshadowing the brows of precipices, waken in her mind a dream of a sunless world, of a realm of death and utter oblivion. 'High above me a sea of fog, silence, cold. — Here and there, through the mist, shadowy woods, snowy sides of enormous mountains;... a strange feeling overrules my mind; the last epoch of the world seems to have come; an austere old age weighs on the foreheads of the alpine giants, absorbed in solemn thoughts of God. — The radiance, the vain show of sea and hills are past from centuries. Even the sun is darkened. And if I were to speak I should lower my voice, as in church'. Through keen-scented pinewoods she reaches a place whence she descries a little lake, lying afar in pensive loneliness, in charmed sleep, turned to a many-hued jewel by the reflection of the evening sky. 'We walked on soft mossy meadows, where the foot sinks noiselessly, — we went over gentle risings of the ground, through secluded dingles and humble hillocks, — until we discerned far below, among sombre firs, the quivering of blue waters. — A small lake glistens, gem-like, in a ring of woods and lawns and hills. — It was sunset; the snow of the fiery-red mountain-heads mirrored itself in the midst of the limpid tarn'. The sultry air of the Mediterranean shores, the sea fanned to sleep by the languid breath of roses and mimosas, come upon her like the glamour of a dream-world; her beloved star, which here hangs low on the horizon, casting a flickering ray on the waves, looks estranged, unfamiliar, in its solitary pride. 'Still stunned by the violent throbbing of the train, that brought me here,

I fancy myself dead and in a world of spirits. — The star, that in my native land rises high in the blue, between two gloomy mountain-tops, here glitters low over the haze of the sky-line tinged with pink and pale green. — Yonder, they say, there is the sea; — my lonely star has therefore become a queen, and trails at her feet a silver skirt. She too is now a stranger to me. — O my thought, my eternal companion, you are still with me; — and it is enough'.

During a short period she is held as in a trance by the last ardour of life, which, like a flame clinging to fast consuming wood, bursts into a brilliant blaze before dying out. 'What a glorious sunset! — I would follow you, Sun, and never find rest, — ride over fiery deserts, over oceans, — work, work. — I never was aware, till now, of the ardour hidden in myself. — The vile oil burnt out, a powerful essence now glows in my life's lamp. — Until to-day I looked at forms and hues with drowsy eyes; now I feel everything I perceive as if it were in my heart; there it becomes alive' (1). Prati and Aleardi were the precursors of the kind of poems to which *Miranda* belongs, and in Fogazzaro's treatment of blank verse there are traces of Aleardi's technique. For his lyrics Fogazzaro preferred metres various in movement and cadences, but he did not often seek for great elaborateness in metrical structure, and, when he did, his verse is not always free from a certain stiffness of rhythm and a harshness of sound; when, on the contrary, it is running too smoothly, it seems about to sink into prose. In several cases, however, as in

(1) *Miranda*, pp. 131, 148, 111, 158.

Samarith of Gaulan and in the interpretation of Schumann's Op. 12 (1), he obtains fine symphonic effects by moulding the stress-arrangement on the very throbbing of the pulse of passion.

In *Samarith of Gaulan* the poet throws a vivid light on the soul of a sorrowful, impassioned girl, and brings out her mystic love by contrasting it with the taunts and rough jests of the worldly youngster trying to wake in her heart memories of vain pleasures, of jewelled dresses and garlanded cups. But the Saviour appears to her; only He can assuage her longing for Eternity; from the shore she runs to Him through the blinding surges, on the tossing sea of passion, descrying now and then in the storm His figure covered with splendour. At daybreak she dies on the strand; she is not lonely in her death, and, where the ripples spread into pearly dew, she receives from immortal hands the crown of supernal bliss. The close of the poem is particularly fine. 'Samarith, her eyes glowing with unquenchable fire, ran with swift, unconscious feet over the black yelling surge, through the furious tempest, over the harsh shrieking surf, through the silver whirlpool of waters, by the wind tossed, scattered, cast to the moon. — She offered to Him her hope, her faith, straining after Him her beseeching arms, holding out her face to Him, whom she descried at intervals before her. — He, enfolded by the silvery spray, called her with His imperious look, and soon disappeared in the storm. — ... At last she fell panting on the beach. There she lay among

(1) *Versioni dalla musica*, Da Schumann, *Pezzi fantastici*, Op. 12, 'Nella Notte', p. 347.

the boulders and the foam, motionless, supine, her face waxen, her lips half-open, exhausted, but still palpitating. She did not see or feel any more herself, the world, or even Him. — But, when the glory of sunrise beamed wide in heaven, rising from behind the gloomy deserts of Gaulan, the colour of her face changed; — she heard her beloved Jesus whispering: 'Come to Me'; she strove in vain to raise her heavy eyelids; she smiled, and died'.

The theme of his novels is essentially the strife between the enticements of the world and the call of a lofty ideal, the call to a life dedicated to the service of God; the main personages tend to an ascetic purity, but without ever attaining it completely, the worldly element insinuating itself in some subtle way into their would-be intellectual passions and mystic speculations; the vehemence of their emotions brings them into conflict with their religious views; though they exalt the spiritual side of their attachments, they do not arrive at the absolute renunciation of the true mystic. The motive is only faintly shadowed in *The Mystery of the Poet* — a melancholy idyll in the minor tone of *Miranda*, interspersed with delicate lyrics, — but *Daniele Cortis* is a typical example of this struggle between love and duty. *Little Old World* and *Little Modern World* are clever sketches of an historical moment, the dawn of Italian fight for freedom, in the northern provinces. The leading thought of inward struggle between good and evil powers returns in *The Saint* and *Leila*, in which the author, stepping on dangerous ground, expounds his theories; they were written when his powers were failing and he was treading entangled paths in spir-

itual loneliness. In all his books we feel ourselves confronted with studies of moral problems, not unlike Hawthorne's subtle examinations of sin-stricken consciences. In the beautiful poem *Night of Passion* he expresses with lyric brevity the idea, which, as we have seen, is the ground-thought of his novels: the struggle between the lure of matter and the aspirations of the soul. The fascination of the night-magic, the apparition of the dead woman, the outburst of mystic elation, are rendered with poignant intensity; all energy is concentrated in his inner life, and the imploration arises from his heart like a fragrance from a flower opening to a Spring sky. 'Infinite God, penetrate, through every sense, into the secret depths of my sick heart, — burn out and renew all that I feel and think, — take me to Thee on a whirlwind of love! — And lo! there, before me, the dead woman appears, reclining among flowers, smiling to the sound of unearthly voices, entranced, pale with an immense vision. — The clouds have a sense of mystery, the knowing shadow shudders, every blossom gives up its soul, like incense, — to the stern, sublime Love. — She comes; I hear her soft voice, and words I do not know if of love or of pain; — she goes on speaking so tenderly, so sadly! — I weep so loud that I cannot hear, I feel an aerial hand upon my head, as a sign of forgiveness; and I raise my face, I inspire into the depth of my heart the breath of the departed one. — All is solemn, all the world seems to kneel in adoration; — speak, Lord; thy servant is ready' (1).

(1) *Ultimo Ciclo*, 'Notte di Passione', p. 382.

All his doubts swept away, stirred by the tumult of combat, he prepares to dare the powers of Evil, to wage war to the prophets of despair. — 'Closed in armour, thoughtful, through shadows forlorn, I go towards the clash of a remote conflict. — Wherever the battle is engaged, a place is reserved for me. — Soldier! advance to help the faith sublime, that lifts man up from the alluring mud, — to support all fervent love and noble indignation kindled by this faith' (1). The same zeal shines out, undaunted, in *At Night-fall*, a poem composed from the standpoint of one who views life from a towering altitude; he is lying on the conquered summit, looking calmly on his existence of strife and sorrow; he hears a voice calling him forth again to the fight; he knows that, though his body and his soul are weary, his energies spent, his work is not completely done, and he is ready to obey the divine summons, conscious that the battle shall not be fought in vain. 'The evening is closing, and I, so bold at dawn, — am lying, wounded, exhausted, at my place, — fronting the stars... — I served the Almighty; now I implore peace; — I should like to die here, turned to the orient. — O evening-star, you are looking at me so intently! — What do you mean? — Perhaps, O my lofty, true friend, you know my fate; — perhaps, because I did not yet give all my blood, — God bids me rise and die standing up. — Let it be so, let us rise, without tremor or fear; — let the heart burst open before Him, — and shed its last drops of life' (2).

(1) *Valsolda*, 'Novissima Verba', XI, p. 254.

(2) *Ultimo Ciclo*, 'Scende la sera', p. 431.

Fogazzaro was more concerned with thought than with form; his poetry, which might be compared with Coventry Patmore's for mystic ardency, does not possess the finish of *The Unknown Eros*. He lacks the fine touch of Manzoni and Zanella, who were in some way his leaders in technique. He combines spontaneity with a literary grace, a direct truth of utterance — leaving bare the outlines of thought by discarding all mere ornament — with a fervid eloquence; his lyrics keep the first bloom and freshness of their original draft. But, while the poet is looking for lofty effects, the artist is often too easily satisfied with the expression. His style is in a certain manner overcome by his eagerness to set forth his wealth of ideas and emotions.

The tendency of Fogazzaro to devote special attention to the spiritual side of life — a propensity roused in part by the example of such keen psychologists as Paul Bourget and Henry James — started a movement which freed Italian literature from a low realism. His influence was in the main an ennobling and elevating one; he is to be ranked among those authors whose attitude to life, renewing the very spirit of aesthetic theories, produces an emotional rather than a descriptive art,—an art which intensifies the individuality of the craftsman, and which we may see represented, perhaps in its fullest form, by the vaporous and exquisitely poignant figures in the paintings of Eugène Carrière.

Arturo Graf's *Medusa*.

The seed of pessimism hidden in the early Romantic singers — in the delicate melancholy of Gray and Collins, in the sombre meditations of Young and Blair — burst into a strange efflorescence with the dreams of Poe, with Beddoes's grotesque 'Dances of Death', with Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*; its bitter fragrance pervades the atmosphere of the poetical world of Swinburne and of Arnold; it overshadows the region where Gissing and Hardy show us their creatures under the sway of a blind, pitiless fate. In art, we first descry this conception of life in the desperate smile of Watteau, in his figures apparently light-hearted, but concealing under their gaiety an incurable melancholy; in music, its very spirit sings with a mournful sweetness in the *Nocturnes* of Chopin — lullabies of heavenly grace to a suffering world, promises of everlasting peace, soothing from the starry skies the imploring agony of mankind; while in Beethoven's melodies Sorrow appears so angelically beautiful that we cannot but recognise that she is divine.

In the realm of poetry the dark plant did not take long to strike its roots and spread in Italy, distilling

a poison which soaked deeply into our souls. The black flower of pessimism blows under serene southern skies as well as on bleak northern crags; its intoxicating perfume floats in ancient Indian valleys, over the silky ripple of the Ægean and on the hills of Recanati. It is sometimes the outcome of the weariness engendered by the monotony of the sea's and sky's changeless blue, by the radiance of a luxuriant landscape, bringing out more sharply the contrast between its indifferent loveliness and human anguish and distress. With Leopardi the dusky island of sadness breaks at once into view on the serene ocean of Italian poetry, and looms gigantic, projecting its shadow on several contemporary writers.

Graf's pessimistic conception has a twofold origin; it springs from an innate bias of his mind and from the mingled influence of Leopardi and Baudelaire; the latter's is indeed predominant, and most of his dismal airs were composed while he was wandering in the poisonous, artificial garden of the French poet. A classic perfection is prevalent in Leopardi, tinged, however, with a romantic pathos, as a white star seems at times imbued with the topaz fires of the afterglow in which it is setting. Graf's poems leave us with disgust in our heart, and not with that transcending sense of beauty which, in Leopardi, rises above his desperate desolation. In the refinement of thought, in the soulful melody of the verse lies the difference between Graf and the author of the *Remembrances* (*Le Ricordanze*). Although not so shallow and diffuse as the insipid lucubrations of Rapisardi, Graf's poems are sometimes unsatisfying, because the artist in him can be content with a superficial emphasis,

neglecting those subtle shades of feeling which alone give a supreme value to a work of art. On the other side he does not show any of those audacities of diction which reveal a perfect mastery of language. But he has in common with these melancholy Romantic singers a narrow and dark outlook on life; their song is the lamentation of mankind, lying in the bondage of sorrow, in utter abandonment to despair; they do not even try to free themselves from their spiritual fetters. Their attitude of mind is neither that lofty melancholy which is born of nostalgic yearnings towards the eternal, and blended with supernal hopes — the melancholy of Chateaubriand and Lamartine — nor that sombre earnestness arising from a broad conception of existence — Dante's or Shakespeare's point of view — where the trivial is mixed to the sublime, tragedy to farce, rough ditties to melodies of celestial harps; but it is a corrosive *taedium vitae*, a pernicious disease of the soul.

The poet observes this baleful thought spread through his mind, encroaching upon all other ideas, destroying all healthful germs. 'In the murky night of my soul a dreadful thought is slowly ripening, like a poisonous fruit, that in a dusky valley, under remote skies, sucks a black mixture of bitter venoms from the sluggish air and the putrid slime. — The wicked thought is growing in the darkness, silently; little by little, it fills all the bewildered soul. — And the day is near, the hour is going to strike, when I shall die of the poison with which the lurid fruit is infused and swollen' (1). We perceive in him a morbid liking

(1) *Medusa*, Torino, Loescher, 1890, p. 227.

for ugliness, for the bizarre and the macabre; besides, some of his poems are seasoned with the coarse spices of a low realism. His mind is a mirror tarnished by the mist of doubt, by the vapours of dim, inconsequential ideas, based on the fallacies of Schopenhauer and Hartmann. As voluntary exiles, these thinkers withdraw from the world of men, and keep to the last their hostile, surly attitude towards life. Graf recognises that there dwells in him 'a proud, rebel spirit, hard to himself, born to be his ruin and to cause distress to others'.

He only descried under the brilliancy of the outward show the cruelty of the struggle for existence, the work of destruction; and this perception clouded his vision, overpowered his judgment. He forgot that from the rocky ground of the caves of sorrow imperishable gems are often born. Intent, above all, to the inward drama, Arthur Graf vainly tries to explore the labyrinth of his mind, where, as the lonely soul in Tennyson's *Palace of Art*, he finds himself confronted by lurid, enigmatic shadows (1). 'Neither from the stars of fire, nor in the sidereal silence, in the unearthly stillness of a more remote, unknown sky, is the immutable Fate watching us; — but, wrapped in gloom, he is sitting, as a supreme monarch, within ourselves, in the dark recess where the lightning of thought has its birth. — Inexorable, occult, he rules with silent gestures the course of our wretched life. There he is sitting, sombre dictator of hard laws, insensible to remorse, unconcerned with our heart-breaking woes'.

(1) *Ib.*, 'Fato', p. 266.

He is terrified by the power of inexplicable forces, by the immensity of space, where every instant sees the birth and the death of numberless worlds, hurled into unexplored gulfs by the inexhaustible fiery fountains of the deep. 'Do you know the heavy mortal anguish of the infinite?—the horror of the endless, bottomless ocean, into which, through all eternity, the hours sink down and the ages perish?—the black, profound, algid sky, where the clamorous many-coloured vanity of the world vanishes as mist?—Do you know what it is to feel the tears of all the living, the silence of the dead?' In his atheistic conception the universe becomes to him a hateful unsolvable riddle; in his nightmare he is lost in druidic woods, through which death is riding on his spectral steed; he is wandering on desolate plains, along slate-coloured swamps, or under pale arctic fires; he is soaring in the limitless space, where the stars as flower-dust are strewn. And he compares himself to a burning meteor crossing the icy gloom of the endless night (1). 'You, refulgent stars, with which the ether is blossoming and glistening, — you, strange clouds of splendour, ripening in unknown abysses the fiery seeds of future suns, — you, streaming comets, roving in aimless flight, — I, too, am a star, driven by a blind, irresistible motion; — I enter the gelid air flashing fiercely, scattering warmth, light and life in the void; and I do not see the centre of my orbit!'

Art itself, deprived of its mystic significance, becomes a torment to him, a subtle, fatal pain. Poetry

(1) *Ib.*, pp. 129, 119.

is not conceived as a flower growing spontaneously out of the soul, but as a parasitic plant feeding its gorgeous blossoms on the vital sap of the tree to which it clings, on the very blood of the singer's heart. 'O green, sharp leaflet', he says to the emblematic laurel, 'you seem to me as sharp as a thorn, as green as hemlock or wormwood'. Even the penetrating charm of music cannot pour balm on his wounded heart; the beautiful lyric on Schubert's *Serenade* ends with a cry of agonised pain. 'The moon is travelling, clear and slow, behind the poplars in long, straight line; — the shore of the shimmering ocean is thickly covered with holm-oaks; — the slender tapering columns of a ruined Ionic temple gleam as a pale dawn in the blue mist. — From afar, from afar, through the placid immensity of the night, a song comes to me; — the long note, panting with anguish, drunk with tears, swings slowly in the universal stillness. — The melody flies over the meadows, awakes the echoing dales, floods the serene heaven, — trembling with mournful remembrances, full of a heart-rending sadness'.

There is hardly a bright reflection in his sombre dream-palace; the same idea informs all his poems, mirrored in different symbols — grim, wild images, the chimeric brood of a feverish brain. But they are not mere decorative details; they are, on the contrary, surcharged with meaning. Take, for instance, *The Sphinx* (1): 'Lonely, in the midst of the desert, the hieratic monster lifts up erect her imperious head out of the sands heaped around her sides. — Her

(1) *Ib.*, p. 81.

inscrutable face seems carved in the beryl sky; her lips are tightly set, her large calm eyes behold the infinite. — Men and gods pass and dissolve around her; she does not appear to change; the wilderness is strewn with ruins of vanished centuries. — Who knows what is stirring in her brain? Does she comprehend the word in a single thought? Does she meditate on the inanity of the whole universe?' He is hypnotized by the haggard eyes of Medusa, the symbol of his despair; 'You alone, O Medusa, are standing, changeless, clear, huge, in my troubled soul, among melting shapes!'

He endeavours to bring life and nature within the shadow of his own despair; therefore whenever he alights on a bright subject, he turns it into an emblem of pain; this interpretation is stubbornly forced on all events, on all things; even the azure sky 'lies heavy on the world like the lid of a sepulchre'. Only rarely, as in *Water Lily* (1), he finds in the landscape an image of purity and joy. 'Under the lustrous, silky sky of a Spring morning, the ancient pine wood, motionless, taciturn, black, rises on the mountain-sides. — On the summit, where the forest is deeper and sterner, a limpid tarn, enclosed by a narrow margin, gleams, silent, as if enchanted; and a solitary water-lily blossoms on the water's transparent veil, as a love-dream blows on the depth of a chaste soul, touched by the ray of a divine idea'.

His poems are like vigorous engravings, somewhat crudely drawn, with rigid outlines and a violent chiaroscuro, with a hard metallic glitter in their lights and

(1) *Ib.*, p. 234.

an inky blackness in their shadows. There is often a striking, diamond-like limpidity in these elaborate etchings. But his allegories are studiously combined, as if they had not been perceived at a single glance, a perfect whole, the only possible and inevitable embodiment of the idea, but had been wrought out by a persistent effort. We might say, according to the distinction of Coleridge, that his images are inspired by fancy rather than by imagination. Compare, for instance, Poe's *City in the Sea* with Graf's *King Death*; both poems embody the same idea in the same obvious symbols; but the latter is wanting that mysterious fascination, that strangeness and that sense of reality which are the tests of all true works of art. 'A huge mountain, made of walls of fallen cities, arises black against the vast glimmer of stars; — on its precipitous summit a stately temple glows, — round, open on all sides, with an opal dome and diamond columns. — In the midst, on a throne draped with dark purple, Death is sitting, motionless, crowned, beholding the world prone at his feet'.

When he sets to record his impressions the memory of happy hours fades from his mind, and he restricts himself to the notation of afflictions and troubles, excluding from his interior landscape all cheerful lights; likewise, when dealing with the outward world, his imperfect vision, struck only by mournful details, keeps our attention riveted to the darker side of things. Thus in *Tragic Sunset*: 'As a dying gladiator the sun falls down, and, from the farthest gap in the sky staring with his fiery pupil, hurls himself into the depth of the greenish waves. Smoky clouds throng all around him, a threatening crown; — and he still

wounds them, shooting awry his quivering, red-hot beams. Then, horrible, sombre, as a huge bird of prey, from the zenith Night swoops down on the world' (1). The soul is submerged by these shadowy waves; she is deaf to the solemn harmony of Creation, blind to the awful majesty of the Universe; she cannot understand any more the sublime words: 'Canst thou bring forth the day star in its time, and make the evening star to rise upon the children of the earth?' (Job, XXXVIII, 32).

His poetry is the outcome of theories, that can only give evasive, unsatisfying answers to the supreme questions, — of confuse systems, pulled down and weakly rebuilt by successive thinkers, futile attempts to find a solution of the mystery of the universe without the leading light of faith. This fundamental error leads to fatal results. When the poet has spent his energies in always baffled endeavours, he mocks at all lofty ideals and noble efforts; his soul is burning with anger, and subtle irony makes place to stinging sarcasm and violent invective. 'I curse you, gloomy labyrinth of my mind, — and you, my sad heart, my eternal enemy, — and you, O baleful dream, parching my soul with the thirst of vain desire, luring on its way forlorn my proud, sterile life, — you also, O ringing verse, draining my vigour, repeating in empty play the anguish which is slowly killing me'. Sometimes, however, his sardonic laughter changes to a weary sigh, his imprecation dies down to a passionate sobbing.

(1) *Ib.*, pp. 223, 200.

Though he is loath in his pride to admit a divine law, there is in his heart an unquenchable, insatiable longing for the Infinite, and, even in his crises of despair, we meet with mystic yearnings, with fervid supplications. 'O golden sunbeam, making green again thorns and brambles among sullen rocks, graciously descend into my heart, — and thaw the frost of this hideous death, so that the fragrant flower of hope may spring up again from this hard ground'. Now and then a sudden light pierces the gloom, a sudden awakening to truth stirs the soul; 'I hear in the boundless peace of everlasting space the plashing and singing of the Fountains of Life — and I remember my ancient hopes, and I find again in my heart the dead faith'. Hope is still alive in his inmost soul: 'a little star is shivering on the verge of the horizon!' (1), and it will rise and glisten clearer and clearer in later years; tracing the course of his inspiration from *Medusa* to *The Rhymes of the Forest* we perceive a brightening of outlook, we are aware that the poet is aiming at a broader and healthier vision of life.

(1) *Ib.*, p. 191.

Giovanni Cena.

Pascoli was the herald of a new poetical school, to which belong — with others, such as G. Gozzano and P. Mastri — Giovanni Cena and Francesco Pastonchi.

Madre — a book of lyrics poignant with intense pathos, where he evokes the agony of his soul at the death of his mother — is a tragic prelude to his later compositions, the poems of *In Umbra*. The mournful note struck in his first production sounds persistently throughout his work. When just on the threshold of youth he had — like Pascoli — to learn a hard lesson, as, brooding over his distress, he felt the sting of pain pierce deeper and deeper into his heart; then he came to adopt the serious view of life that underlies all his literary achievements. *Mother* is a message of sorrow, uttered with a simple, rude power; we can easily follow, mirrored in the limpid lines, the progress of his mind from the numbness, the painful trance brought about by these hard experiences, to resignation and hope.

He too — like Pascoli — was held back from despair by the remembrance of a humble, loving soul; in

his dark inner world the figure of his mother arises aureoled with the radiance of immortality.

'I stood senseless and dumb, looking at the endless snowfields; — pearly flowers, by no breath of wind stirred, hung from the trees. — When I heard the slow murmur of prayers die into the white stillness, I turned. — The bed was like an altar; she was lying in a pious attitude, her hands folded on her breast; and all around was so sweet and serene that I said: 'For certain God has come down to her'. — Her eyes shone like a flame, transfiguring her face' (1).

When he is lost in a labyrinth peopled with ghostly presences, with whispering phantoms, she comes to him; her effulgence pierces through the changeful appearances of the earth, and her love is to him a secure pledge of everlasting life. 'But still my dizzy soul is reeling on the brink of a black chasm; — a great part of myself sleeps, buried in a place whence mortal sight recoils. — I close my weary eyes; I lean my head upon my hand; — light as a breath, a Shadow comes to me, leans over me, strokes my hair..... O vain dream!' — 'My spirit, full of dark things, is groping in the gloom; — as a blind man, it looks into itself, to itself it listens, — to itself it speaks words hard to understand'. — 'Then you will call the watchful soul from her inmost realms, — and unfold to her the wondrous treasures of the shadow. — You will dissolve, for a moment, the cloud, — behind which Mystery is glowing, — and my mortal senses will be struck dumb; — then you will explain how

(1) *Madre*, Torino, Streglio, 1900, p. 33.

all was illusion for both of us, — how only outside the flesh is Truth' (1). And he bends before the Apparition, weaving a wreath of mystical roses for her grave; his heart, like a flower crushed in the dust, exhales a bitter and intoxicating fragrance. He goes with his father to visit the recent tomb; 'rare blades of grass were withering, yellow, on the black earth. One heard the mournful murmur of the neighbouring rill, a whisper, as of human words. — But the sky was so beautiful, so prodigious the sun!' He looks at 'the boundless fields, at the forests, golden over the resonant river, at the terse mountains, — which, already covered with snow, — shone among flaming clouds like stately foreheads high uplifted in an apotheosis', and he breaks into words of ecstasy and hope: 'O Mother, to you, until I live, I consecrate the joy of life you gave me among keen throes, and which I lost too soon, and this voice trembling with raptures and spasms, and the pulse of life rushing out of the unfathomable abyss, and all colours and shapes, and what is inside and outside our existence, — and this soul of mine, which kindles as a star and ascends towards the serene heavens of the infinite Light — for ever' (2).

While his first book is a wild outcry wrung from his heart by a private sorrow, the subsequent volume, *In Umbra*, is devoted to the world around him; his spirit, ennobled by pain, feels itself in sympathy with suffering mankind. His vision of life is therefore opposed to the egotistic sensualism of the Decadent

(1) *Ib.*, pp. 7, 58, 64.

(2) *Ib.*, pp. 67, 68.

school. In this book we assist to a sinister dawn, the gloom gradually lifting from his soul, but making place to a cheerless, stern day. We perceive the peculiar state of a soul still perplexed by a long dreamful isolation. He turns to the contemplation of human distress; in the wards of hospitals he compels his heart to drink to the dregs the bitter draught of pain; his look alights with infinite pity on the wasted faces; he feels the vain aspirations to the sun, to life; he understands the sacredness of sorrow. 'O my soul, do you still sigh for the mystic snows of the mountains? Do you still strive towards free horizons? Far, far away are sunrises and sunsets. — O my soul, quaff this human sorrow, absorb this pain and this dim sense of a living, unknown Shadow, and this smell of dying flesh, floating on the air like an acrid incense'. — 'The sun is flooding with light, through the high windows, the Temple of Sorrow. — O sun! how many loving words are whispering to thee these souls never satiated with thy glory!' 'The beds are glowing as white altars where human sacrifices are slowly wasting away'. The dying 'behold in the gem-like, pale skies the last twisting flights of birds work out long embroideries, — they behold the slender boughs swing in the evening breeze, they feel, even in the daylight, Somebody, who rises grimly over their souls, and draws them under his wide wings, which will bring them into the silent realm of the Shadow' (1). He is trying to see what hides below the immediate surface of life, to pierce the matter

(1) *In Umbra*, Torino, Streglio, 1899, pp. 9, 10.

edging with clay the divinity of the soul. Sometimes, rebelling against the malignity of the world, he is led to a dark conception of life, not unlike George Gissing's grim outlook on mankind. His work is therefore rough and harsh, but adorned now and then by delicate images, like frail, sparse blossoms on a twisted ancient hawthorn blasted by the lightning; and everywhere burns an eager yearning for spiritual beauty.

Nature is to Giovanni Cena the gorgeous stage where the tragedy of man is enacted; and the soul may find some comfort by raising her eyes from the contemplation of her inmost wounds to the changeful magnificence of the surrounding scenery. The poet is always listening intently to the mysterious voices of nature, — to the short, enigmatic phrases uttered by birds, to the hoarse lamentation of the torrent struggling through the dale; he endeavours to interpret the meaning of its serene smile, he describes a relationship between his sorrow and the sad, starry vastness of night. He hates the crowded streets, feeling happy only in lonely wooded valleys, in secluded, sun-flecked copses, or looking at the desert fields, where, dimly lit by a smouldering autumn sunset, the last daisies and the crimson flowers of trefoil weave a strange pattern on the faded gold of the stubble.

The scenery of Piedmont could hardly be better represented in painting than by Fontanesi's, Delleani's, Calderini's works; in poetry it still awaited expression, except for Carducci's famous ode. In Cena we do not only find a clear-sighted observer of rural subjects, but an artist whose mind has grasped the essential-

ities of the Piedmontese landscape. His lines are a terse mirror of its rivers keeping in their pale green waters the unstained purity of the glaciers where they had their birth — of its hills covered with acacia thickets, white with blossoms in May, their honeyed scent filling the sunny slopes humming with bees — of its crown of Alps, glorious after the storm, when banks of mist are lying in the deep sapphire of mountain hollows and their glittering tops arise in aërial gold. Its character — at once rugged and delicate — intimately akin to the poet's soul, exercises a constant attraction for him; and he draws from his keen perceptions the comfort which dwells in natural loveliness, the peace breathing from the plains when a luminous haze is hanging over the iridescent snow-fields (1), the rapture which comes from hushed summer evenings, when, fragrant with new-mown hay, the meadows lie asleep in the warm light. The inanimate world is thus quickened by his poetic sensibility. Like Pascoli, he derives many of his themes from rural scenes, trying to render the mystery which underlies the simplest aspects of life.

In technique he belongs to the Impressionist school; with such poets as Verlaine and Jammes he shares a direct and vivid simplicity of representation. Rejecting what is merely decorative and keeping what is

(1) 'It was one of those mild, pallid days, veiled by subtle transparencies, in which all things assume virginal appearances and unusual vibrations'. — 'The changeless vapoury sunlight spread faint gleams upon the roofs, and the rays pierced the violet veil floating over the white purity of the snow'. — *Madre*, p. 13.

expressive and genuine they reach a depth of impression which is rendered more poignant by the effect of concentration. In the lyrics of Giovanni Cena sorrowful memories tremble as black winter trees mirrored in a shivering, lonely pool; but grief blends musically with a sincere feeling of spiritual loveliness, and the charm of his poetry lies in this chord of beauty and pain.

Francesco Pastonchi.

Francesco Pastonchi was born in San Remo, on the 'Riviera', but he has lived so long in Turin and its neighbourhood, especially in the village of Grugliasco, that Piedmont may rightly claim him as one of its sons. The milder character of his native race, however, betrays itself in the tone of his inspiration.

Some singers of northern Italy seem to reflect in their work rather ruthlessly, as in the mirror of a gloomy pool, the grimness of its frowning mountains, the mist-enwreathed glaciers; in Pastonchi's poems, on the contrary, the reflection, though faithful in the main, is softened, by a tender lustre, as if by the radiance of water-lilies scattered on the surface of the black tarn. He depicts with skilful hand the monotonous expanse of furrowed fields crossed by rows of mulberry-trees, the hills rising pale and desolate in the hazy atmosphere, but he fondly lingers on blossoming orchards, on the peace of starry nights, on the mellow glow of autumn gardens. This statement may be well exemplified by *The Last Fruit*, a poem full of delicate beauty. 'When July was glowing, — in the calm shade of the orchards the fruits were smiling golden-red through the luxuriant foliage, — until they were gathered by the countryman. — Now,

in the serene autumnal weather, one of them is still glistening on the bough, forgotten by the reaping hook ; — the tree has instilled its sweetest sap into its late, last child. — The fair fruit, as yet untouched, on the top of the slim bare tree, — inspires with love the whole dying valley, — and it appears as if, intangible, it enclosed within its crimson beauty — the last flames of the nostalgic soul of autumn ' (1). His capacity to evoke the stern grandeur of the Northern scenery is evinced by the fine and vigorous sonnet, *The proud poplars*. 'I am looking at you, titanic poplars, black against the glare of remote evening clouds ; no wind-breath troubles the peace of your dreamy souls. The rivulets speak to you, timidly weeping ; the swallows surround you with wheeling flights ; but you rear, disdainful, your motionless shapes in the gathering shadow. — Meanwhile labourers are coming back from the tilled plains, — white oxen jogging on before them, no more urged by the switch. — And you, poplars, see these dwarfish beings vanish through shaggy brakes, — and you silently await the birth of the stars ' (2).

In his first volume of poems, *La Giostra d'Amore* (*The Tournament of Love*), he was clearly under the influence of the Italian lyric poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, particularly of Guido Guinizelli, Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia ; the book is therefore representative of the revival of medieval poetry, which was started by the Pre-raphaelites.

(1) *Belfonte*, Torino, Streglio, 1903, p. 57.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 103.

His conceptions are transfigured by a mystic sense. 'I think that, in a friendly evening, she, who here is sighing worn by melancholy, urged by a desire drawing her to Heaven, will soar up like an angel. — To the poets she appears then a chimera shaped by their delirious mind, — but the trees, quivering as a lyre, will sing the praise of her who ascends to a brighter sphere'. — She is like the angelized lady of the *Vita Nuova*. 'She has forgotten all wordly cares, and mortal praise cannot touch her any more. — How pure and white and slender! — like a lily; — and yet she is as steadfast as a fortress. — When Love lets fly the darts, she is safe under angels' wings' (1).

In a sonnet (2) which recalls a well-known poem of Carducci he describes her in a church. 'She was radiant with a new loveliness; — and from her lips, as she prayed, a bright star soared through the shadows to Heaven'. From that moment a new conception of love rules his life. 'Since I have seen the star ascend from her praying lips, I feel no more the appeal of sense, no more I rebel against the just restraint. Free from wild desires, triumphing over all vain tumults, to-day I say: 'I have truly known what is love''.

The Tournament of Love, though a fine achievement in imitative art, does not reveal the true character of the author; the sentimental here too often falls into the rhetorical, and the rigid, stately figures, like images painted by Margaritone d'Arezzo or Taddeo Gaddi, are not transfigured, as their proto-

(1) *La Giostra d'Amore*, Milano, Treves, pp. 40, 71.

(2) *Ib.*, pp. 14, 15.

types, by fervent emotion and immortal longings. They are simple and almost abstract beings, endowed with an artificial loveliness; as in a richly wrought arras they hold lilies and roses with stiff gestures; they represent the dawning of love in the poet's heart, but we cannot help wishing for a more sincere expression of his feelings.

In *Belfonte* he is beyond his poetic prime, and displays a gravity of thought and a sobriety of form which are wanting in his earlier works; he is no more dreaming in the walled garden of the *Roman de la Rose*, but roving on hills and mountains. It was Pascoli's example which broke the spell; but his return to nature is also the inevitable outcome of a weariness of the world. The contemplation of natural beauty throws a veil of forgetfulness over the sorrows of the Past; he finds a pure, spontaneous joy in the quickening spirit of Spring, which gives him control over his restless heart. In lonely gardens, when October colours the air and the shadows are slowly shifting round the golden trees, the poet, lulled by the tune of unseen choirs of birds, attains a peace which drowns his anguish and quenches the sombre fire of passion. As he wanders through valley and meadow he descries in the clouds unknown blossoms of dream and mystic figures; thus in *Towards the Unknown*. 'Over the hills the afterglow sets on fire a royal palace of vapours, dragged by a bristling dragon. It seems as if the whole of it, even the dark tower rising in the midst, were going to tumble down, were yearning to fall into ruins. — Pale clouds are sailing in a throng to the great crimson furnace; other cloudlets, a white flock, are passing under the

conflagration. — With the growing shadows all far noises melt into the whisper of a river, which rapidly draws my thoughts along with its course. — All is flying towards the unknown. — I know nothing else: yet it is sweet to me to go on, surrounded by mystery' (1). And when, under the limpid flames of the stars, among the mountains, he listens to the murmur of the sleepless stream, he forgets the vain tumults of youth. 'O Night, I never enjoyed your mystery so much as in these Alpine dales. Here, when I think of the fleeting years, and of the mystic rhythm of the worlds, and of the eternal smile of the skies heedless of our earthly tears, I feel myself free from all vain dreams of glory, I clearly perceive the lowness of my heart and of my song' (2).

The poet has lived so long in close and intimate communion with nature that mountains, waters and trees have assumed for him the intense pathos and the vitality of human beings. *The Blossoming of the Peach-tree* and *Water* are the best representatives of his impassioned apprehension of life in nature. 'The slender peach-tree, feeling the caress of the soft March air, would fain burst into bloom, — but he sees the mountains still capped with snow, and is afraid of being confronted by the sudden threat of bitter winds. — He is anxious, too, that his blossoming may displease the tall poplar, the king of the horizons'. One night he is pervaded by a strange thrill, and, at sunrise, 'he beholds himself radiant with dew, wrapped

(1) *Ib.*, p. 19.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 36.

in a rosy, fragrant cloud of flowers, swaying softly in the morning breeze' (1).

His soul is in perfect accord with the surrounding landscape; nature is to him a source of inexhaustible delight, and he paints the rural scenery with a calm enjoyment quickened by flashes of fancy and sudden suggestions of subtle truths. We are far from Wordsworth's poignant tenderness and from Tennyson's dream-like pathos; the emotional depth, the passionate earnestness of Matthew Arnold are also beyond the reach of Pastonchi's inspiration; but he succeeds in giving us glimpses of that fervid inner life of nature,

(1) *Ib.*, p. 101. — Cf. 'Water', *ib.*, p. 116: 'I love you, water, born in the lap of Night, or in mountain caves bristling with icicles; — I love you, yearning through the untrodden wilderness to the bountiful sun. — Now a rock withstands your course, now you are swallowed by a chasm; — you slide down, veiled in shadow, then you plunge into caverns, and come out to mirror again the sky. — Restless, childish, for ever untamed, with what a timid sweetness you weep in the deserted courtyard! — But, merrily garrulous, through the brambles of a ditch, — you are a faithful companion to the poor, — along the shadows of his lonely path'. — Cf. in *Italice*, pp. 67, 70:

Acqua, che un desiderio di luce
Trae da remote vene
Per la inquieta chiarezza dei fonti, ...
Acqua, allegrezza eterna della terra
Che ne ride con tremulo fulgore,
Tesoro cui nessun pugno rinserra
Ma gode ogni umil cuore, ...
E tu cantavi assiduamente ignara
Ripercotendo le turchine selci,
Anima gaia d'un vallon solingo.

of which human souls seem to partake as of an intoxicating wine. The girl singing in the autumn twilight among the purple vineyards becomes in his poem a fit emblem of the eternal youth of the earth, of the mystic powers hidden in its depth. 'For a long time, in the smoky evening, I had looked for the woman, who had drawn me from rest with her sweet singing. — I shall never forget that sincere, youthful face, which did not turn, froward, from me, but stood more proud, more absorbed. — O dusky plain under the dying day! — The vines broke its silent melancholy with their blood-red rows. — She, as if April were blooming all around, was raising the song of her youth to the fields burnt out and to the rifled vineyards'. — The same symbolic meaning is evident in *A Warning*, where the image of the boy suggests to the poet a simple, if somewhat sad, philosophy of life. 'November is lulled to a deep drowsiness by the melodies of far rivers; — the Earth wears a tender smile, — like a girl falling asleep under the spell of a golden dream. — A boy, near a stream, is snapping twigs from a ragged hedge, amusing himself to throw them into the resounding swirl of waters. — O my soul, sometimes you too, like that boy, look at life flying away, and cast into the waves what a provident sort gives you. — Rouse yourself, it is time; — and, even of bare twigs, weave for yourself a simple crown' (1).

It is easy to trace the revelation of beauty which gradually dawned upon his soul, and the growth of

(1) *Ib.*, pp. 56, 58.

his technique, through his works, *The Tournament of Love*, the odes *Italiche*, *Belfonte* and the book of poems *Sul Limite dell'Ombra*. Limpidity is the foremost quality of his style, a quality which he shares with but a few of his contemporaries, lured by the dazzling, transitory charm of 'impressionism'. The richness of his song, as he renders his various moods with fine modulations of tone, reveals a perfection in poetical technique, which may sometimes atone for the slightness of the subject, and which is only thoroughly enjoyed by people who can perceive and appreciate the mere music of the language, the verbal melody woven out of harmonious words by an accomplished craftsman. The metre employed throughout *Belfonte* is the sonnet; in its strict symmetry and order this metrical form might become monotonous, were it not treated with consummate art and given a flowing ease by the frequent use of overlapping lines. The poet knows how to draw manifold effects from the resources of the sonnet by means of subtle devices: strange chords of rhymes, inner changes of rhythm and unexpected cadences. *Un Tramonto* (1), where the difficult rhyming of words stressed on the last syllable but two is managed with great skill, is, however, rather an elaborate experiment than a true work of art.

A vein of sadness, determined partly by the lack of religious principles and partly by the influence of Carducci's and D'Annunzio's pagan conception of the world, runs throughout his work; he feels that vain

(1) *Ib.*, p. 56, and cf. *Sul Limite dell'Ombra*, Torino, Streglio, 1905; 'Ammonimento', p. 163.

is his love of nature, and that, in spite of his keen perception of her beauty, she is separated from his soul by a mysterious gulf; he is struck with the same despair, which the Belgian poet Fernand Séverin has so finely expressed in *Le Cœur en Détresse*:

Ne pouvoir t'embrasser, Nature fraternelle,-
Pressentir seulement ton grand cœur ingénu,
Et lui parler toujours un langage inconnu!

His individuality gives him a place among the poets, who, avoiding the sterner side of life, live in a romantic isolation, and inspire us through their melodies with that peculiar calm not untinged with melancholy, which we are wont to associate with autumn and the light of serene sunset skies.

La Cattedrale of Francesco Chiesa.

The medieval architects, in their pursuit after forms that might convey, with quick, intense appeal to mind and senses, their mystic aspirations, created a style intimately responsive to the Romantic soul. The Gothic cathedrals, rising like visible music in lofty, noble proportions, awake long reverberations in the heart of modern writers; they turn with a passionate regret to the times when the various manifestations of the aesthetic ideal — the poem, the song, the building — seemed to forsake the earth and soar in exultation, in plenitude of spirit, to the serenest heights of heaven.

In *La Cattedrale*, the poet's soul flies like a nestward bird to the Middle Ages, to a world purified by suffering, strengthened by faith. Chiesa does not sing, however, the softer loveliness of such edifices as the churches of Siena and Orvieto — dainty-coloured, enamelled caskets, inlaid with rare marbles, their interior painted as an illuminated missal — but the stern, grey, titanic cathedrals of the North, borrowing their grand outlines from the structure of mountains

and clouds, standing out pale and stately from the sombre background of tumultuous skies. He evokes these mighty buildings, he idealises them into a single archetype; the veil of ages is rent asunder by his vivid imagination. 'The Shadow of a powerful epoch rises before my soul, — a Shadow dismal, and yet sparkling with gold, — as if it lifted up again its royal treasures, its flashing, strange weapons. — I hear a vast chord of hymns and litanies, a dull clangour of vehement bells, a clashing of iron and stone, — the pang of a gigantic work. — Through the bustling streets gorgeous pageants and bands of warriors are passing, upraising many-coloured signs: crosses, standards, swords. — And the Plague brandishes her scythe. — Men vanish away; their mirth, their wrath are no more; — thou, O Temple, rearest, as a mountain, thy dreadful pinnacles, and impassively holdest thy sway' (1).

His suggestive lines bring before us those times when the scattered tribes united to build the magnificent shrine; day by day the structure grew, swift as a dream, beautiful as a heavenly, unfading vision. At nightfall the workmen descended from the high scaffoldings as into a pit of darkness. 'Then, amidst the din of hammers, Night appeared, silent, slow, closed in funereal veils, her hair entangled with stars and mournful clouds. — And the artisans came down, along columns, over bridges, through dark passages, with a dim rumble, as the rings of a chain lowered by Night into a deep, mysterious chasm. — And

(1) *La Cattedrale*, Milano, Baldini, p. 5.

Night, at last alone, sat among the interrupted works, —surrounded by towers and arches; — and her hair, laden with jewels and shadows, streamed over the pause of the human effort' (1). With the first gleam of dawn the work was resumed; the stone blocks were hoisted up, were hammered, 'with a dull clang, like the voice of bells muffled by thick snow'. And at last 'your white image, O Holy Virgin, ascended, and stood on the top. — And You diffused a lustre on the black surging stream of people, and the fleeting days received a drop of your serene grace in their troubled earthly impurity; — not otherwise a rock yields sometimes its hidden wealth to the passing river, so that a golden thread flows down mixed with the sand'.

An earnest, sincere, fervour inspired the humble craftsmen; everybody 'wrote his own page in the great book of stone'. 'Someone came to work from his native forest, bringing with him the remembrance of the trees and of the shadow of the valley where he lived. — And Spring blossomed on the tops of the columns, and, through the flowers, loomed the sleepless, eager eyes, the cruel, enigmatic face of a sphinx, — or the claws sprang out of a writhing, sneering devil'. And they carved on the plinths the scornful melancholy of demons. The obscure Presence, indeed, walked invisible among the people; Satan, prowling furtive in the gloom, roused them to a sacrilegious rage, stirred them to outrage and destruction; they set fire to the shrine, and the flames spurted from the crack-

(1) *Ib.*, p. 15.

ling windows, coiled around the spires. In the fitful glare the Stygian crowd of monsters in the gargoyles seemed to start into life, to hover — vultures in suspended flight — waiting for the prey ; the timber burst into blaze, and lead fell in deadly showers from the melting roofs. ‘ And Victory — after she had, with a bound, disentangled herself from uncertain trials, and was safe — ran through the streets, flaunting her red ensigns and her fires over the glazed eyes of corpses ; — maddened, she climbed the steep staircases, ascended to the roof ’. And the raving mob was watched by the statue of the Saviour and by the figure of Satan. ‘ And You, O Lord, You opened your arms, with paternal invitation to forgiveness and peace ; — but grim scorn flamed in Satan’s eyes ’. The work of destruction takes place ; ‘ then the flames draped the lofty ruins with huge crimson curtains, and licked the hands of the King of Hell, as their master’s ’. But a sudden awe dispersed the angry rabble, and the church rose again from the blackened remains ; when the barbaric hordes had laid waste the land, from the blood-drenched ground the cathedral sprang up again, like the immortal symbol of the yearning of Man towards the Infinite. ‘ As from the conquered towns the blaze leaped high in the darkness, straight, thin, mingled with yells, — from the sad earth arose steeples, cusps, spires, mingled with songs, tapering like flames, as white as dawn ’.

The poet is pervaded by a fervid enthusiasm while he beholds in his synthetic vision the cathedrals, beautiful and fantastic as if revealed to the artist in a trance, glimmering like lilies above the dusky plains harried by savage conquerors ; they are indeed a

source of sublime inspiration. They change in a wonderful way according to the light; in the after-glow, lit by the reflection of cloudlets ardent and thin as fluttering leaf-gold, the ancient structure seems all made of amber and ivory, touched with faint purple shades; when the moon in a halo of roses appears over the trees — and the azure sky turns pale at her beauty — the weather-worn walls take on a frail dream-like grace. At night, through the ringlets of stone slender as vine-tendrils, the constellations are seen slowly drifting on the fathomless sea, and their sparks of fire crown with a changeful diadem the statues emerging, outlined in black, from the shadowy mass of the church. The medieval artist carved the numberless effigies on frieze and capital with bold strokes, with daring originality and power; with power, and yet with poetical 'naïveté', with a pathetic delicacy, the same that made him insert in the clumsy, heavy traceries on the missal-bindings clear amethysts and moonstones opalescent as mistletoe-berries. Under his chisel the marble rippled into snow-white flowers; the stone filigrees along the roofs glistened like crystallised foam or dewy branches of blossoming hawthorn, dividing the sunlight into sheaves of slanting vaporous rays through their traceries.

The architects managed skilfully the illumination of the nave; they opened large stained-glass windows in its sides, so that the walls seemed hung with tapestries of gems, the ogives burned like glowing embers in the apsis, the rose-windows shone like jewelled butterflies; the iridescent light broke as with a burst of melody the darkness of the aisles, sounded a high note of colour in the murky forest of pillars

and arches. And the incense-clouds were like the exotic perfume of this fantastic efflorescence, unfolded by the fervour of a spiritual Spring. 'The lofty windows', says the poet, 'are glaring like a blood-red sunset through the intertwined boughs of a black wood; — our eyes get perplexed about the meaning of these incandescent pages' (1).

He observes the strange effects of the various illuminations; at sundown 'all the pinnacles and spires seem to blaze and flicker as the beautiful fierce flames of a pyre, stirred up by a great wind'. In the moonlight the cathedral is like 'a pale mountain wrapping itself in veils of ghostly silver and gold'; and the moon explores the temple with its wandering rays 'searching for Beauty, wherever she hides herself, disentangling her from the shadows'; the wan light 'flows sweetly, spreads into wide pools on the marble floor, gathers as a tremulous treasure in the folds of the draperies of the statues'. And, in the storm, when clouds lie brooding on gables and buttresses, the lightning is playing among the pinnacles, the rain lashes furiously the gaunt walls, 'the cathedral hurls in defiance its thousand spears, lets loose its swift, barking monsters, from whose snouts the water rushes down with a long howl'.

But the Gothic artist left unbroken the shadow in the recesses of aisles and vault, as an emblem of Mystery; and in the twilight atmosphere the golden flames of tapers and lamps are like adoring angels, who can only be traced by the splendour of their

(1) *Ib.*, p. 39.

eyes. Beyond the portal, thronged with effigies of prophets and kings, a great gloom confronts the poet, 'a mystery, as of deep roads stretching afar to places out of all human quest'. The dark air is throbbing with the roar of bells; and the blind beggars, crouching in the porch, appear to listen to a grander music, after the hymns, the pealing of the organ, have come to an end. 'Motionless as marble, among the marble pillars, the blind men are lying on the threshold, — listening to a wind moaning with infinite woe, — blowing, it seems, from profound caves. — ... Then all voices are hushed; the echoes die out. — But there remains an eagerness in their still, blind eyes, as if they were intent on an unknown sound, louder than all sounds, ascending with the incense-wreaths; — perhaps they are listening to You, O Lord, as to a nocturnal sea overflowing the invisible strand'.

The medieval architects tried to slake their thirst of the Infinite by shaping with a severe magnificence an image of the intangible World; their work — an allegory of the fervent prayers of mankind, of her poignant and nostalgic sorrow, of her indomitable Hope — outlasts the centuries. We still see it in grey, old cities, shedding its refining influence of beauty on the rude minds; from afar, in a moonlit night, its sharp, thin spire emerges from the houses like the lance of a warrior watching over the slumbering town. Francesco Chiesa has sung its mystic beauty in a sequence of vigorous sonnets. He breaks the traditional restraint of this metrical form, sometimes extending a single sentence through the fourteen lines; and the ample, impetuous phrase, where the thought expands at ease, gives the sonnet an energy and a rapidity

of movement not to be found in its old and more cramped structure. The ringing lines seem composed to solemn organ tones and to resound with the vibrations of bells. — Though the subject be one, these poems are varied in mood ; they are written with an abrupt style, always succinct and synthetic, and the chiselled, dense expression is well suited to the close-knit texture of the verse. *La Cattedrale*, though not a work 'de longue haleine', is a sufficient proof of a high poetical gift.

Giovanni Pascoli.

Nature — not as an inexplicable dream, but as a vivid, consoling reality — is the main theme of Pascoli's poetry. He contemplates the landscape with the wondering, eager eyes of a child, with a primitive freshness of feeling; he does not derive his knowledge of nature from the works of other writers, but from a long and intimate acquaintance with country life. Italian poetry was not to be renovated by turning to classical writers, but by rendering in an original way the elusive beauty of the world. Therefore, in the lyrics of *Myricae* and in most of his subsequent poems, he tried to express with a new, deeply appealing simplicity the various aspects of ever-changing loveliness which surrounded his soul. He loved the humblest things as well as the grandest appearances of nature; he depicted with the same accuracy the floweret withering in a cranny of a crumbling wall and the glory of the sun setting in the sea — the gnats quivering in the slanting evening beam and the stormy clouds gathering over the mountains.

Among his most striking characteristics is an exquisite perception of the sounds composing the vast and continuous symphony of the countryside. He conveys with a skilful arrangement of words, enhanced by the use of onomatopoeias, the song of the redbreast echoing in the stillness of an autumn twilight, the twittering of swallows soaring in mellow sunset skies, the chirping of crickets in summer nights, the eerie call of the owlet at moonrise. 'Where was the moon hiding? a pearly dawn already floated in the sky, and the almond-tree and the apple-tree seemed to rise on tip-toe to have a better look at it. — The lightning was playing in the black clouds low on the horizon; a voice was calling from the fields: *kiu...* — The stars were shimmering, thinly scattered in the milky mist; I heard the swinging of the sea-waves, a rustling in the brakes, I felt my heart starting as at an echo of a cry far away. — A sound of sobbing throbbed in the distance: *kiu...* — Above all the luminous tree-tops a sigh of wind was shivering; the grasshoppers shook their tiny silver bells (tinklings to invisible doors that perhaps will nevermore be opened?) — and there was that death-wail: *kiu...*' (1).

His short elliptical phrases and his parsimony of details remind us of Impressionist paintings or of Japanese prints, where mere fragments of outlines and patches of colour suggest the complete representation of a landscape or of a figure, the less important parts being easily supplied by the imagination of the

(1) *Myricae*, Livorno, Giusti, 1908. — 'L'Assiuolo', p. 125.

onlooker. His work, however, is not merely descriptive; he has not only the vividness of images to trust to in order to produce a forcible and lasting impression; a delicate sensitiveness and a passionate love for hidden, humble sorrows bring a new charm into his poetry. He understands the tragedy of the blasted oak-tree, the uncanny melancholy of the song of a little waterfall in shadowy woods; and the raindrops on the frail petals strewn upon the ground by the storm wind are to him like glistening tears. He knows how to suggest the shiver of mystic terror, the dim sad forebodings, which haunt and darken the soul when a shadow crosses the sunny solitary path, when an uncertain shape steals silently away into the twilight distance, when the merry warble of birds stops suddenly in a radiant blossoming orchard. The serene, studious life of Giovanni Pascoli stands out from a dark, tragic background: his father — when the poet was still a boy — was killed while returning home, among lonely hills; the sombre remembrance lingers throughout his work, and a deep pathos underlies his brilliant descriptions. The lyric *The Tenth of August* (1) may be quoted as a characteristic example of the inmost spirit of his poetry. It is the night of St Lawrence, and the sky seems to weep over the earth showers of falling stars.

‘I know why so many stars are glowing and falling down through the calm air, — I know why so many tears are glistening in the heavenly vault. — A swallow was coming back to her nest; they killed her; she fell among thorns; she had in her bill an insect, the

(1) *Ib.*, p. 107.

supper for her little ones. Now she lies there, as crucified, holding up that insect to the remote heaven, and her nestlings, in the shadow, are waiting, and puling lower and lower. — A man too was coming back to his nest; they killed him; he said: I forgive; and a cry remained in his staring eyes; — he had two dolls for his little ones. — Now, there, in the lonely house, they are waiting for him, — in vain; he, motionless, bewildered, points out the dolls to the remote heaven. — And thou, Heaven, from the height of serene worlds, thou, infinite, everlasting, oh, thou art flooding with stars, as with tears, this earth, this murky atom of Evil!’

In *The Ring* he strikes the keynote of his early poems: a heart-rending pain that pervades his idyllic candour. ‘The ring glittered on his hand in the act of blessing, far from home. — Dying, he raised his hand, which was flooded — o my father! — with hot blood. — And my mother kept the ring on her heart. — Then my elder brother had it; o my little father! The treasure shone like a blessing on his slender finger. — The gold had now a spot of rust, near the setting of the gem... a spot of blood. — And an evening did you try to wash it away, o my brother? oh, what a loud weeping! the ring had dropped in the sea. — And there it lies, on the ground of the heavily sighing sea; from the deep heaven a star beholds it in the depth of the ocean. — That spot! the infinite ocean strives to wash it away; — in vain; — and the star, which sees it, speaks of it to the infinite heaven; — ah, in vain!’

From death he draws his highest inspiration; the ancient churchyard, where the dead of his family

sleep, while in the moonlight the cypresses wave their slim blue shadows over the marble slabs, or while the wind is howling through the yew-trees and the rain is slashing the crosses hung with withered wreaths, inspired him with one of his finest poems, *Il Giorno dei Morti*. His pensive soul recognises the sublime beauty of sorrow, its purifying power, its supreme nobility; a heavenly radiance floats round the familiar visages worn out by the fierce flame of the suffering soul. A terrible crisis of despair is evoked in *A Poor Gift* (1). 'Throw away the weapon that has cast a wicked spell upon you. — Hope for the last time. — Wait, wait until the cock crows in the black village. — The cock crows, ghosts are driven away, and the cursed witch who appeared to you shall also fly away. — Your dead mother will come to you, with a sad face, murmuring prayers; — she will pray you to keep this poor gift — life — she once gave you'.

But a ray of hope breaks through the clouds and lights up his soul; this psychological state is well exemplified by the poem *Fides* (2). 'When the afterglow was shining, scarlet bright, — and the cypress appeared as of fine gold, — the mother said to her little son — 'A garden of trees like this one glitters in Heaven'. — The child sleeps, and dreams of golden boughs, of golden trees and forests of gold, — while the cypress tossed by the wind in the black night weeps in the tempest's blast'.

(1) *Myricae*, p. 95.

(2) *Ib.*, p. 55.

His literary tendency, fostered by a deep and loving study of Greek and Latin poetry, is restrained by his love of simplicity, directness of form and truth to nature, by his interest in human life; so that, instead of Carducci's learned and partly rhetorical inspiration, we have in Pascoli an art based on spontaneous feeling. Carducci shows now and then a more intimate grasp of nature, as in the classical beauty of the sonnet where he compares the effect of Vergil's poetry to a moonlit night. 'As when the pious moon spreads over the parched fields the icy coolness of summer nights, the rill murmurs glistening in the white sheen between its narrow banks, the hidden nightingale fills the vast serenity with melody, — and the traveller stands still, thinking of the fair tresses he once loved, and forgets his journey, — and a mother who vainly pined for her dead child turns her eyes from the grave to the lucent sky and from that diffuse lustre a soothing sense of peace steals into her heart, — and the fresh breeze is sighing through the great trees, — such is your verse to me, o poet divine'. But, in Carducci, learning led to imitation; nature taught Pascoli otherwise.

He aimed at reproducing the colours and sounds of the countryside, and sought to realise his ideal of a poetry founded on rural scenery and the experiences of humble lives; these subjects, with which he had a genuine power of sympathy, became highly significant to him, and he discoursed of them with eloquence, proclaiming in homely themes a grandeur unknown to the common observer. Thus the teeming earth, the shepherd watching his sad-eyed herd, the sheep closely packed together as the storm-cloud creeps up

the mountain slope, the slow steady pace of the oxen as the ploughman turns the furrow, take on a new majesty; thus simple, lowly things came to be regarded, through his gift of genuine imagination, as objects worthy of poetical treatment. He describes the various agricultural works, the labours of the husbandman, under stern or clement skies.

Reading his *Poemetti* we breathe a free air; vast shadows of clouds sweep over the motionless sea of tilled fields stretching away to the dim horizon; we wander, in Spring, on paths overhung with bramble-rose, or tread, in Autumn, the steep way leading up to the hills already touched with snow beneath lowering skies; we walk among the trees dripping heavily with damp, on a grey November day, or we watch, in a summer evening, from the brow of a crag the lengthening shadows creep on the meadows streaked with flowers as with stripes of coloured light. We hear the song of the cuckoo. 'They had ended their work of tying up faggots in the vineyard, and all, old and young, stayed awhile in the sunset light; and white heads and fair and black heads gleamed under the clouds on fire. They were listening to the cuckoo, to the two limpid, echoing notes of the Spring evenings, notes so remote that they seemed unreal, so near that they seemed to sound in their hearts'.

These qualities of faithfulness and wide range of observation are seen at their best when he selects for poetical treatment subjects congenial to his temper; then he translates into words, with graphic and vivifying touch, impressions keenly felt; and the freshness of the scene he has just left is preserved in his work with an enduring charm. His tendency to paint is

balanced by the wish to suggest feeling, so that description and pathos are blent in his poetry, perception being here entirely subordinate to emotion. Very often we get rather a suggestion than a definite picture; the image comes from within, not from the mirror of the eye of an impassive observer; therefore we have not an objective, but a subjective art. See, for instance, his picture of a blossoming orchard. 'Have you forgotten those wonderful mornings? Peach-trees, plum-trees seemed to our eyes pink and white clouds. That orchard appeared to us through the veil of our tears, and kept, mirrored in itself, for days, the glow of a sunrise. — Then came mist and rain, — and, sheltered in our cottage, we listened, through long days, to the grumbling of the fire. The white and red trees disappeared, molten in the fog; and in the wan sky there was a sound like an assiduous hissing of spindles; and it rained and rained... And afterwards, whither had they gone, the branches like to filigree-work? All petals were lying on the ground; and, at dawn, we trod the vain memories, each impearled with its own tear'.

The blending of emotion and description appears with even greater evidence in the evocation of Margaret among the daisies. 'The daisies burst out of a sudden. And lo! one day the lawn is filled up and the rock is starred with them. Who was aware of you, white flower of Love, closed in the heart? And, all at once, the black earth has changed colour. They are thoughts, once unknown, now gazing at you, whether you go or stay, — born, in the shade, of the smile of a star and of a dewdrop. It is winter, and the rime has scorched all the flowers in the meadows

and the frost has burnt out the grass ; and you are opening now ; the tips of your silver petals are tinged with a faint blush ; a dead leaf, roving, covers you up for a while and passes away on the wind. You are alive when life is about to end ; you do not change with the changing of the sky. — Margaret, her heart absorbed in her dead love, will gather you and let you drop from her fingers, thinking : ‘ He loves you not, loves you not any more ! ’

All literary preoccupations have been set aside ; in his pictures truth is flashed back directly from reality, not through reminiscences of other writers. His poems are the outcome of a mind that has fed on natural beauty, gazing intently at its surroundings, near and far, — at the subdued chord of pale purple crocuses and brown sere leaves when the snow melts on the hill tops and the dank sod breaks into flowers, or at distant mountains solemn in the evening light, at floating curtains of mist cleft by vaporous beams, at clouds that seem to catch the reflected glare of embers in the afterglow. But natural scenery is here always intertwined with personal feeling ; a striking example of it we find in *Chrysanthemums*. ‘ Where are now those violets, those roses ? Clouds drift and vanish, birds fly afar, dead leaves pass away on the rainy squall as in a burst of tears ; all the lingering flowers are now gathered in the cemetery. They have the hues of sunset, and a faint smell, as of a damp night. And they will deck all the graves of this churchyard, which is so beautiful to me since one whom I loved was brought here, after she had gathered, in Spring, on the sunlit slope, humming a song, all those violets, all those roses ’.

He finds in nature a symbolical meaning; the mistletoe clinging to the apple-tree and slowly drying up its vital sap is an emblem of the power of evil that stealthily destroys all good qualities in the heart of man. 'And you, o tree, were pining away, and beauty and goodness ebbed out of you; — and all your sweet colours, the juice of your fruit, the fragrance of your blossoms are now enclosed in a sickly pearl of glue'.

When we turn to the work of his maturity we perceive a striking change in subject and manner; it coincides with his concern in contemporary events, in the condition of the Italian people, in the glory of Italian enterprise. This interest supplied him with new matter, gave argument to his unflagging activity and urged him to work upon a new line of thought. The majority of his later poems betrays this preoccupation of a loftier subject. In the two Odes, or rather Hymns, as he calls them, *To the Duke of Abruzzi* and *To Umberto Cagni*, he treats of the heroes who faced obstacles and dangers in the regions of the North pole. 'The three masts point to the sky, as three cypresses from a tomb; a frozen ocean crushes the hull; the wind howls through the shrouds, in the night... The boreal aurora is throbbing on high, green, shading into gold; it rises and bursts into flames; it sinks and hides into mystery; as at a silent beckoning, it returns, blazing, — a will-o'-the-wisp of an infinite cemetery. And you heard the Genius of your race, Italy's Genius, the sleepless, immortal Michael Angelo digging out of a block of lava some huge *Twilight*; you, pioneers in the white porch of the world, you certainly heard the echoes of his hammer in the

universal silence, heard him toiling in the shimmer of the boreal aurora'. It is the Genius of a noble race, endowed with the gift of self-sacrifice; and these heroes have conquered the realm of Powers hostile to man; and now they return from the land covered with ice and everlasting clouds. 'They drove a winged sledge, amid a hoarse gasping of dogs; and their little company seemed but a flight of sere leaves drifting on the blast'. But already their leader had asserted their triumph with the simple grandeur of mythical conquerors. 'And on the top of the world, where he had won his victory, he raised a stela; and the frozen surge of the sea was the stone of its plinth. There was no chanting of hymns; only the dumb constellations were shining above the silent Ausonians; around the stela, Boötes was slowly turning the wheels of its golden chariot'.

In these later poems he often treats classical themes and sings the glory of his native land. He remembers that Vergil wrote his poem on the shores of a sea on which the fateful exiles came to seek the ancient mother of his race (1). 'A lingering star still gleamed in the blushing dawn. 'Italy, Italy!' you heard them cry from the prow, through the gasps of the panting sea. The ships advanced, black on the quivering, reddening billows; and on the stern of one of them a tall old man stood holding up a cup of wine in sacrificial rite, his eyes raised to heaven. 'Italy!', and the sea was heaving with an eternal whisper'.

An historical interlude in his work is *Le Canzoni*

(1) *Nuovi Poemetti*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1918, p. 204.

di Re Enzo, a result of a pronounced characteristic of the Romantic movement: the revival of the chivalry and romance of the medieval world. The same tendency we see in Carducci's *Canzone di Legnano*, with perhaps a more direct appeal to patriotic feeling. In all these three 'songs' of Pascoli the ancient subject matter is likewise vivified by a genuine emotion; but by far the most noteworthy of them for terse vigour of expression and highly imaginative treatment is *La Canzone dell' Olifante* (1). Re Enzo, a prisoner in Bologna, hears the *Chanson de Roland* sung by a minstrel beneath the window, and, while listening to the 'laisses' punctuated by the war-cry 'Aoi', he dreams again the old imperial dream. — The sound of Roland's horn has reached Charles; thrice calls the oliphant, and Charlemagne is coming back with his vast army. 'In the battle-encrimsoned dale of Roncesvalles the warriors are lying among black boulders, at the foot of black pines. — The glen is full of wild rose-bushes; the night is clear with moonlight; lilies quiver in the red valley. — Beside each dead warrior his sword is stuck upright in the ground, the sword with cross-shaped hilt; and they lie supine with crossed arms. — A lily is born out of the mouth of each dead knight; each has a lily, so that the emperor may know him'. And they will awake when Charlemagne arrives, and fight again to victory.

From the first, Pascoli saw and recognised the boundless cravings of the human soul; they are always

(1) *Poemi italiani e Canzoni di re Enzo*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1914, p. 157.

present to his mind, they constantly recur throughout his work. While in such a poem as *The two Trees* his deepest convictions are only dimly foreshadowed and he does not give us the clue to his inmost thought, its prolongation being lost in darkness, in the ode *To the comet of Halley* he clearly asserts his spiritualism. Here the figure of Dante is boldly thrown into relief, awaking in us the consciousness of our supreme destinies; here nature has only a secondary significance; man is foremost; and we perceive the eternal pulsation of the light of Life beneath the gloom and ruins of the world of Matter.

‘O star gone astray, perhaps you are seeking a door to flee from the universe! O wandering star, do you remember this dark Earth? Only eight of your years have past since you, in a sombre evening, saw one of our Earth, Dante. He too was wandering, alone, hopeless, without a goal, an exile from his native land and from himself; and, on his aimless journey, he stopped, his ear struck by a melancholy sound, far away. — And you, comet, then just risen from the abysses, you were blazing along the horizon. — He was listening to the distant vesper bell, that seemed to weep. And you touched his brow with your sinister ray, and you said: ‘I can shatter you, Earth; you shall dissolve as a grey incense cloud, o black Earth! And you, Shadow, why do you stay?’ — Alone in the immense space he stood against you, o star of death; he, a shepherd of mankind, replied: ‘I am one who thinks, and my morrow is Eternity’. He saw the chasm full of raging winds, the flames and the ice; he heard the endless rumble of the great waters; and he descried the gleaming path

stretched between the deep sepulchre and the stars. He was the pilgrim of Mystery. And you pointed out to him Death, and he killed the monster in his powerful clasp. — The stars became wan; — only you were in the pallid sky that you scourged with your fiery mane; reeking like a pyre, you showed all crimes, all calamities to the Earth. But under your threat his spirit arose and he ascended, as through an eternal moonlight; in his wide open eyes died the reflection of the mortal stars, and he saw Eternity'.

As in the poem which we have been considering, the figure of Dante is glorified in a passage of *Poemi italici*. *The Divine Comedy* was his lifelong study, and in his exegeses — *La Mirabile Visione* and *Minerva Oscura* (1) — he viewed it from an original standpoint. Here (2) he shows us the poet in the forest of the Earthly Paradise. — With the song of the little birds

e il singulto dell'acque andanti e l'almo
odor delle viole e de' ciclami,

accompagnato dal respiro calmo
del mare eterno, su per la pineta
veniva il suono d'un eterno salmo.

Venia Matelda lieta oprando, lieta
cantando, con sue pause per un fiore,
sempre movendo verso il suo poeta.

Ora la selva antica dell'errore
e dell'esilio e d'ogni trista cosa,
splendea di gioia e sorridea d'amore.

(1) See also *Sotto il Velame* (1900) and *Conferenze e Studi Danteschi* (1915).

(2) *Poemi Italici*, p. 64.

Dall'oriente acceso in color rosa,
 cinta d'ulivo sopra il bianco velo,
 perennemente a lui scendea la sposa,

per trarlo in alto, al Libano del cielo (1).

In *The two trees*, the poet, dreaming alone in a stormy November twilight, finds himself confronted by the supreme problems of existence; a morbid depression comes over him, and, when his attention is arrested by two trees rising on the edge of a field, in the silence, in the strangeness of the evening glimmer, they become allegorical, awe-inspiring, giving him suggestions of mystery and terror. They become symbols of two conflicting ideas: of the perennial renewal in nature and of final, absolute annihilation. A disquieting thought weighs on him, as, from his little corner of the earth, he gazes into the abyss of the starry heavens and considers the whole universe ruled by a crushing law. He feels a sense of loneliness and despair in the immensity of the night; like a rumble of mighty wings coming near, the wind tells him of the play of elemental forces in regions unknown; his mind soars in spaces empty of life, in

(1) 'And with the sob of running waters, the sacred smell of violets and cyclamens, came through the pine-wood — accompanied by the calm breathing of the sea — the sound of an eternal psalm. Matelda came, happy in her work, joyfully singing, pausing now and then to pluck a flower; and still she moved towards her poet. Now the ancient forest of error, of exile, of all sad evil things, shone with joy and smiled with love. From the East kindled into a rose colour, the Bride, garlanded with olive sprays, upon a white veil, descended to carry him on high to the Lebanon of Heaven'.

the limitless ether, and, shuddering, he catches whispers of remote worlds.

'Now, o Wind, you only brush lightly the leaves, now you tear them away; some of them drop one by one, some fly away in swarms, like flights of birds; when you toss them fiercely, the sky is filled with their rout, and, on the ground, among the clods, there is a great rustling, an aimless fluttering of wings. — And now all have fallen down, and the day is dead; you know it, Wind of the Dead! — The leaves of one of the trees, departing, sing: 'In vain the gale tears us from the boughs; we shall return, green again, with Spring'; — but the leaves of the other tree moan: 'We shall not come back with the blooming of the year; we go away, wrapt in oblivion. Life was but a fleeting mirage. The tree is dead. Adieu for ever, adieu!' — The day is dead and the sad song too is dying away; and the sky is glowing above the black earth. — And now both trees have disappeared in the night. The wind finds its way hampered by leaves and by stars. And my soul sees a great Shadow, a single tree. It rises out of a veil of eternal mist, and fills up the infinite, stretching out its invisible branches from which hang, on all sides, the worlds; and the branches shimmer with a continuous quivering, and the leaves tremble, shaken by violent gusts; and someone drops flickering through the cerulean chasms. — Beneath the glistening crown of the Universe, I hear, entranced, a shriek; a leaf, perhaps, still swings from a bough of the dead tree'.

And there is a kind of veiled despair in the contrast between the life of nature and of man in the words addressed by the waves to the shipwrecked sailor

lying dead on the shore. — After the storm, at sunrise, the sea is calm, and the waves come and go softly whispering; 'they seem to rise behind one another to better see a corpse lying on the strand; and they speak. 'Who is he? Does he sleep? — I don't know; he doesn't stir'. 'We, as humble slaves, move all together, die together, here, with a sweet, regretful murmur. We exist for an instant, we are never the same. We are singing, moaning billows. The sighing wave is now up there, singing; the laughing wave is now weeping at your feet. — You sleep and you seem to open your arms in a dream. We are waves... coming... going...' (1).

Elsewhere, in the symbolic poem *The Book*, he has represented the inquisitive state of mind which is typical of thinkers who have no steady starting-point in their researches and who therefore seek in vain for harmony in the frame of the Universe. Truth remains hidden from them; they are blinded by the clouds of doubt. The scientist cannot or will not make up his mind, and this uncertainty seals his lips; the interior drama is performed in silence. All the main questions remain unanswered, all the problems, which can but be solved by Revelation, unsolved.

Lume non è, se non vien dal sereno
che non si turba mai; anzi è tenebra,
od ombra della carne, o suo veleno.

Here once more a difficult subject is developed with unerring skill. The book stands open on a lectern, in the loft; the winds enter through the doors

(1) *Nuovi Poemetti*, 'Il Naufrago', p. 43.

ajar, and it seems as though someone had come in and were fingering the leaves; 'a man, unseen, is there, turning swiftly the pages from the first to the last; and now turning them slowly backwards, to find again the first; and then, in the rage of his fruitless search, turning them over, twenty, thirty, a hundred at a time, with impatient hand. He stops? Has he found at last what he is looking for? Is he reading? — One instant, and he turns anew the twisted leaves, and begins anew to pursue truth. Thus he goes on from sunset — darting its red beams from black clouds, among wandering mutters of thunder — until the sacred night appears with its desolate constellations. — For ever. — And I feel him, invisible like thought, amid the roaming voices, turning the pages of the book of mystery, to and fro, under the stars'.

Apart from its classical background, the poem *The last Voyage* (1) is of the same type; Odysseus is a dreamer and a seeker of the Absolute, and he is baffled in his attempt; he dies in the pursuit of truth. In spite of his daring, of the eagerness of his search, the riddle of life remains unsolved. The Homeric fable is sketched with skilful touches, setting into relief the sombre cast of the Hellenic mind. — Ulysses is returned to Ithaca; but fate urges him to resume his travels; when, after nine years, he goes to his ship, he finds his mariners who all the time had been waiting for him; still fresh in their memory are the wonders of their adventures, all adversities and troubles are forgotten. As in Dante, as in Tennyson, Odysseus'

(1) *Poemi Conviviali*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1904, p. 51.

stirring words make them eager to meet with lofty endurance the perils of a long voyage. ' Their soul assumed the blue hue of the horizon ; — and they saw the shadow of the Cyclops and heard the song of Circe ; to the mountain one drove — countless as the waves of the sea — his sheep ; the other wove, singing, the everlasting web as large as the ocean '. They sail and see again the islands of the Lotos-eaters, of the Dead, of the Sun, of the Winds ; but, weary of appearances, Ulysses remembers that his aim is to find truth and that only the Sirens know the meaning of life. Drifting on a current the vessel comes to their isle, and two of them are descried in the flowery meadow in the midst of the ocean. ' Tell me the real essence of my being ! ' cries Odysseus to them ; — sphinx-like they dumbly stare at him ; and the boat breaks on the reefs. The corpse of the hero is borne to the shore of Calypso's island, and the goddess weeps over him who had preferred the mystery of human life to the gift of love and eternal youth.

The same thought is echoed in *Alexandros* (I) ; as in the case of Ulysses, the essential quality of his character is a longing for the unknown ; but, unlike the king of Ithaca, the Macedonian conqueror does not die in the attempt. Experience teaches him that truth lies beyond sense, that finite reality cannot satisfy the infinite heart of man. Alexander the Great has reached the end of the world, the shore of the river Ocean, ' beyond which the earth vanishes into

(I) *Poemi Conviviali*, p. 173.

the refulgent night of heaven'. A poet sang to him of a fatal journey, beyond death; and he has done it; but this is the end — Nothing — and he weeps for delusion. He had better stay in his country, and dream; dream is superior to reality.

Il sogno è l'infinita ombra del vero.

'I was happier', he thinks, 'when a long way lay before me, when before me were struggles, doubts, the darkness of destiny, the unknown. Even at Pella I was happier, when, in the long evening, we pursued the sun, that, through the black forests, always farther and farther, glowed like a treasure'.

In *The good Message* and in some poems of a similar character he gives us a series of visions born of a deep religious mood, conceived in sweet meditation, in a passionate longing for the Eternal. His poetry is no more composed of conflicting elements; he is no more lost in a tangle of perplexing thoughts; he is no more content to hint at his ground-ideas, but sets them clearly before us. With lines of a softer harmony, with colours grown brighter and purer, he paints in the mystic luminousness of the landscape the Saviour among children, among crowds filled with an unknown delight by His words, by the divine countenance, the visage of great sorrow lit by an interior flame of unquenchable Love.

This kind of poetry can only be approached through a process of simplification; what it lacks in ornaments, it gains in vitality and dignity; no declamatory phrases must intrude; in the calm inflections of the poet's voice, in the simplified outlines of the scene, we recover something of the intimacy

which we associate with Primitives in art. Jesus is sitting at evening on the hillside, where the olive-trees throw a tracery of quivering shadows on the grass, and a vast whisper reaches His ear, 'a vast murmuring, as of a lake; and He saw an endless throng under the crimson sky, people lying on the brink of ditches, in furrows, on the roads, scattered sheep without a shepherd. And He thought of the immense crop and of the hard work'. — He is pointing out to His disciples the birds flying about and the flowers of the fields. 'Look at the birds of the sky; they have no sickles to reap...' And Judas said: 'They plunder the grapes in my vineyard and the wheat in my farm'. And the Rabbi: 'O you, for whom I came down in vain! — Ask the lark: it possesses but little on the earth, but so much in the sky! It soars, lost in contemplation, in song, up there, alone; and what is its song? The honey that is in the flower of life. — Because there is no plant, no twig, but brings forth blossoms, at the appointed time, near purling source or on silent pool, on moor or tilled field. And the oak, that spreads a wide shade, has a tiny blossom, and the cornflower, that has a slender stem, bears a larger bloom; and the shaggy thistle is everlasting and of the hue of the sky. There is no backward life but flourishes at the proper time; and from the thorny briar comes out the rose'.

Children are coming to the Saviour; and, as in the preceding verses, the poet draws his effect from the divine answer to Judas. 'He pressed to His breast their dark heads, He clasped to His bosom His little heirs; and Judas whispered rapidly: 'Rabbi, between your feet you hold a thief's son; Barabbas is the

name of his father, who shall die on the cross'. But He, raising His eyes, murmured: 'No', and took the child on His knees'.

With fine touches is painted the vision of the dying nun, Sister Virginia (1). 'And the dead Virgins came, with their lamps of fragrant oil, walking in a file, clothed, like her, in white lawn, carrying in the pale alabaster cups their sweet lives aglow; and they were ascending, so that in a short time they were like a white band floating in the breeze between the earth and a star. Each of them bore the blood-mark of her martyrdom on her white stole; and she too had it, on her heart. — Ursula was the first to reach the star, and she knocked thrice with the stem of her lily; and on earth Sister Virginia heard three light tappings at the great gate of Heaven'.

The scenery of *Paolo Ucello* (2) — a poem in which the interest is centred round St Francis — is lit by the glow of Verlaine's mystic landscapes 'bathed in such a white splendour that the shadows themselves are of a rose colour'. The freshness of inspiration that here breathes from his lines is very effective, the more so that the poem preserves in its wording the grace of an archaic style. Paolo Ucello, a Franciscan friar and a painter, is so fond of nature that he adorns the walls of his cell with fields and hills in fine perspective, willows along a brook, cypresses on rocky slopes, orchards where 'yellow hung the pears on the pear-tree and the heart-shaped leaves

(1) *Primi Poemetti*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1907, p. 89.

(2) *Poemi Italici*, p. 5.

of the ivy covered the pond'. He likes birds, and, as he has no money to buy them, he pictures them on the wall. But his love is too great; he is tempted and wishes to possess a real bird. St Francis appears and reproaches him; at the Saint's words the painted birds start singing and the song of a nightingale fills with delight the soul of the old artist.

The living influence of St Francis may be further illustrated by a passage in another poem (1), where the Saint tells Brother Leo the famous words recorded in the *Fioretti* and founded on St Matthew, V, 10-12.

E però scrivi, che se il male al mondo
resta, soffrirlo è meglio assai che farlo;
meglio che dare, è che ti diano; meglio
giacere Abel, che stare in pie' Caino.
E però scrivi, che non è nel mondo
pregio maggiore, ch'essere dispetti,
e somigliare, in anco noi volere
beffe, gotate, verghe, fiele e croce,
all'uomo in terra ch'era Dio nei cieli (2).

La Buona Novella bears testimony to the Christian thought that lies at the root of his best poems. — The *Good Message* (3) is in two parts. In the first,

(1) *Poemi Italici*, p. 54.

(2) 'And therefore write it down, that if evil still abides in the world, it is far better to suffer than to do it — to be stricken than to strike — to lie on the ground, with Abel, than to stand, with Cain. And therefore write it down that there is no higher prize in the world than to be despised, to wish also for us gibes, slaps, rods, gall and the cross, to resemble the Man on earth, who was God in Heaven'.

(3) *Poemi Conviviali*, 'La Buona Novella', p. 199.

In the East, the shepherds — they lead a roaming life, ‘and their heart too is wandering, like the stars’ — are singing in the night; ‘and their song, under the sky, at the foot of the world, was low, subdued, nothing more than the chirping of a nestling fallen on the ground at the foot of its tall cypress’. The Angel appears to them, ‘looking, with stretched arms, like a high slender white cross’, and says: ‘Rejoice! God is descended on earth’. And the shepherds go and seek

il pastore
di taciturne costellazïoni,

‘the Shepherd of silent constellations’. Led by the angel, they enter a hut and ask for the Eternal, the Living One, and are told that the Child will die on a cross. ‘But the universe answered: ‘It is He!’

In the second part, *In the West*, Rome lies asleep after the cruel emotions of the Circus; only one is awake — a gladiator, of the tribe of the Getae, and he is dying; they have dragged him mortally wounded from the arena; and he is thinking of his native land, the river Ister, his children, his wife. — The Angel comes from the sky of Judea to announce peace; nobody in Rome hears him, in temple or palace or in the Suburra. Only the dying gladiator perceives his words ‘Peace to men on earth’ and closes his eyes in peace. ‘He alone heard it; but he said it again to the dead, and the dead told it to the dead; — and you, o seven hills, you did not know what you well knew, o catacombs’.

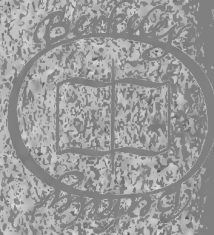
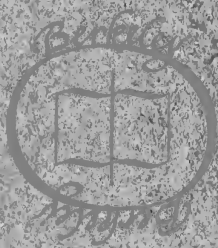
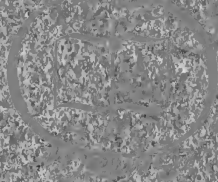
He is master of a supple verse, and rhyme is scarcely heard in the smooth flow of his lines; even

in the 'terza rima' he employs a fluent colloquial language, interspersed with idioms and dialectal words. He prefers the short-lined strophe or the tercet to the sonnet or the quatrain; yet there lingers with him that love of alcaics and sapphics which derives from Carducci's somewhat laborious imitation of classical metres. His thoughts and images are conveyed through a limpid medium; he is a scrupulous artist in the use of words, happy in the choice of telling epithets. But his aim in poetry is not confined within the narrow limits of mere formality; the singer's voice must be, above all, vibrant with lofty thoughts. He says, in *The Skylark* (1): 'I felt the clouds weigh heavily on my soul; and I heard the echo of a clear song, higher than the clouds. O skylark, you sing where your carolling may be alone and sincere, where, above the cloud-rack, there is nothing to steal from you the sunshine. And I wish, like you, to raise a pure, strong hymn, above sorrow, higher than destiny, beyond death'.

A spiritual radiance permeates the work of Pascoli; it is produced by a pure and impassioned appreciation of life, by sympathy with the humble, by the continual suggestion of the supernatural. In the lines entitled *Poesia*, which are a synthesis of his whole work, he has manifested the ideals by which poetry must be inspired in order to fulfil its true purpose. 'I am the lamp burning with a sweet glow! — I am the lamp hanging from smoky rafters, over women who are spinning, and I listen to stories told by lips hidden

(1) *Canti di Castelvecchio*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1903, p. 8.

in darkness, behind the white glimmer of distaffs laden with wool. — I am the lamp swinging before a sweet image of Mary, and my ray kindles in the sad evening shadows the lonely tear on the eyelashes of one who is praying. — I am the light shedding its gleam upon a cradle, the frail bark about to cross the sea of life, — I am the lamp that illumines, in deep sepulchres, the gaunt faces of old men, the long lingering smile of fair-haired maidens, and the visage of your mother'.



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